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MEN *of the*

OUTER ISLANDS

Books by REX BEACH

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DON CARELESS
SON OF THE GODS
MEN OF THE OUTER ISLANDS

MEN of the

OUTER
ISLANDS

By REX BEACH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY BROWN



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in grateful acknowledgment of
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—*Rex Beach*

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MEN *of the*

OUTER ISLANDS

THE MEN

A CHANCE meeting with a man who spent a great many years in those islands to the south of Singapore is responsible for the material in this book. The man had been a wanderer, a pearl-fisher, a planter of rubber and coconuts. He spoke the Malay language and knew the Malay mind. He had formed friendships with the natives, with Arabs, Chinamen, half-castes, beach-combers, with white men who had amassed fortunes, and others—poor devils—who had slipped down life's embankment and finished up in hovels with a slatternly colored woman and a brood of café au lait youngsters. A few of the more courageous had fallen and climbed back again. Then, too, he had known there women of every type. Harlots passing themselves off as Russian blue-bloods, harem women, Chinese concubines, Malay girls who loved lightly or with passionate loyalty, European women whose lives had been churned into tragic turmoil.

He loved that part of the world which he referred to as "down there." In due course I, too, began to feel the strange fascination of the places of which he told me. I saw their color, felt their sensuous and sensual warmth. I came to know, almost intimately, the rich and scholarly

Said Abdul Buraala; the lovely girl, Jafra; Rael Montgomery; the philanderer, Geoffrey Carleton; Scheutema, the Dutchman; and Ahmat Sebam, the old Malay with quaint philosophies, ideals, an inborn sense of devotion to duty, an inexhaustible supply of stories and Eastern axioms and proverbs. An engaging mixture of the naïve and the wise, this Ahmat Sebam.

The man from "down there" held forth to me one night somewhat as follows: "If you live long enough among those islands," he said, "you become a slave to them. They get into your very blood and bones. While you are there you curse them for their heat and fevers, for their bewildering beauty, their damnable remoteness, their insidious charm. You look forward to what you call getting back to civilization. Yet when the time comes for you to go away you take your body and baggage aboard the steamer—but you leave your soul behind.

"Scattered about over the world are men who, after prospering and living their best years in these islands, have returned to the land of their origin to grow old and impotent gracefully. They potter about their gardens and their clubs and watch carefully, or fairly so, over their hob-nailed livers. These men have achieved their ambition to make enough money on which to retire and return home, and for the most part they are contented enough. But when they lie back in their arm-chairs they will always see, in the ever-changing smoke clouds of their cigars, pictures of green islands, coral beaches, chaotic sunsets, and of girls with satiny brown

skins, doe-like eyes, and small provocative breasts. They hear the bubbling laughter of these girls, they smell the warm damp earthiness of the jungle. They are home, yet they are home-sick. They mix another whiskey and soda. Against doctor's orders, but blast the doctor! The old liver can stand one more.

"But by no means do all men come safely through a long sojourn in these romantic islands of the Dutch Indies. Life is easy there; too easy for some. Because of the climate the white man is not expected to work more than a few hours each day. He has too much time on his hands. In some places all work ceases at one o'clock. There is every temptation to slack and run to seed.

"The day begins with your being wakened by a *jongas* soon after six. He hands you a long, cold gin sling (something like a Tom Collins with a dash of cherry brandy added). To the uninitiated, alcohol at this hour of the morning must seem revolting, but it goes very well in the tropics. Having drunk the sling you get up and bathe yourself with water ladled from a great earthenware jar. Whereupon, coffee and fruit (probably papayas and mangosteens) are served to you on the veranda, after which your servant helps you to put on the clothes he has laid out. He laces your shoes and lights your cigarette. Then there is work for an hour, then breakfast, then more work until lunch time. A couple of *pahits* (straight gin and bitters) now give you an appetite for a vast tiffin of curry and rice made as only the Malays

know how to do it. Hardly have you finished eating when a feeling of gorgeous lethargy descends upon you; the combined effect of the heat and the curry. You drop off your clothes and sleep until the boy calls you late in the afternoon. Then you drink tea and go out for exercise—probably tennis.

“There is almost no twilight in the tropics. You may be playing tennis in bright daylight at six o’clock; at twenty minutes past it is quite dark. You go back to your bungalow, bathe again, and have a couple of whisky-sodas. Now someone drops in for *pahits*. An invitation to stay and have dinner with you is usually declined. You are glad; you have heard all his stories and he has heard all yours—over and over again. Your guest goes. You dine by yourself.

“Then comes the time that tries the unmarried man; those long hours between dinner and bedtime. He is lonely and restless. Liquor and women offer themselves as consolation. Both are inexpensive and good and plentiful. In the days before the war we used to import the best brands of whisky, in bond, at a cost of about five dollars a case. To be sure, the friendly customs officer allowed us to land it without paying duty—that helped. And girls, lovely little creatures with sweet dispositions, were as plentiful as coconuts, and almost as cheap. You could buy guaranteed virgins for as little as ten guilders. And if you were not satisfied with your bargain you could return them to their mothers in the morning and get your money back. This liquor and these women

have been too much for many a lonely man out there. He has either gone to the dogs or reduced his powers of resistance to such an extent that a bout of fever has sent him to a grave in exile.

"Don't think for a moment, though, from what I have said that living with those girls necessarily hurts a man. Quite the contrary. Why, I've known men who have been made by them. And liquor, too, is good for you if you treat it right. Your system needs it. I suppose the prohibitionist would object to this statement, but it's a fact that out there the teetotaler as well as the heavy drinker either cracks up or dies; the man who drinks moderately, as a rule, keeps fit and well. You see, the liver becomes sluggish in that climate and a certain amount of liquor stimulates its action. Curry and the other heating foods people eat there do the same thing.

"Because of opportunity, leisure, the perpetual warmth, or because of the absence of conventional restrictions as we know them in the West, life is intense in those outer islands. Most of the time both men and women are acutely conscious of their sex—and you know what that means."

I sat for many nights listening to what this man had to tell of these Men of the Outer Islands. At first, each character appeared to me as a separate and distinct entity, but gradually, they seemed to merge and form a colorful panoramic story of the part of the world to which they belonged.

PHILIP ASTLEY



A SENTIMENTAL PILGRIMAGE

A Sentimental Pilgrimage

THE moment I saw the man I wanted to know him. Erect and bareheaded, an unlighted pipe between his teeth, he stood against the rail of the steamer as it picked its way, outward bound, through the maze of shipping at anchor in Singapore Harbor—white ocean liners; freighters with few portholes and many winches; gracefully impudent destroyers; broad, menacing battleships. There were Chinese and Arab junks and wind-jammers, too, some of which were trim and newly painted, others woefully weatherbeaten and looking as if they had battled all the raging seas since the beginning of time. Here and there barges were being laboriously propelled by crews of sweating Chinamen with gigantic wooden sweeps, a thousand native *prahus* with little red-brown sails glided about like insects on a stream. The warm air was tinged with the peculiar smell of ships.

Somewhere I had read that more vessels cleared from Singapore than from any other port in the world. It seemed likely.

I looked at the man again. He was about forty; lean and hard and deeply sun-burned. His white linen clothes fitted him admirably; a short moustache and a firm chin

gave him a soldierly appearance. He might have been an explorer.

I was making my first trip through the romantic islands of the Dutch East Indies, places I had read about for years and had dreamed of visiting. It was all very pleasant despite the heat that struck through the steamer's awning. Occasionally a puff of cooler air reached us from the land.

The passengers, stout Dutchmen for the most part, lolled full length in deck chairs, and their equally stout wives—all with the appearance of overflowing at bust and ankle—sat reading or doing needle-work. A troupe of travelling entertainers stood outside the smoking room door, laughing and chatting with each other. A tall Armenian paraded the deck animatedly talking with a bright-eyed little Frenchman and waving a new meerschauum pipe from which depended a vivid green tassel. Malay stewards, picturesque in their native costume, moved about carrying trays of tea and iced drinks.

Soon we passed the last of the big red channel buoys and Singapore, now a streak against the skyline astern, gradually sank out of sight.

A steward offered tea to the man who had challenged my interest, the which he accepted with an engaging smile and a kindly word. I noted that he spoke to the boy in Malay which told me he was no stranger to the East. I decided then and there to get into conversation with him at the first opportunity.

But making his acquaintance turned out to be no easy

matter. He took his meals alone at a side table, and spoke to none of us except to return a salutation. Either he was uppish or he had some good reason for keeping to himself. His name was Philip Astley and he was booked for Banda. That was about all I discovered.

Although Astley pointedly discouraged our advances, he was extraordinarily cordial towards the Malay stewards and deck hands. Frequently I noticed him chatting fluently with one or another of them, that amazing smile of his occasionally breaking out to transform his habitual expression of remoteness into one of warmth and friendliness. A queer bird.

We were leaving Tanjong Priok, the port of Batavia. I had pulled out a pipe and was patting my pockets in search of tobacco when Astley, from a nearby chair, addressed me for the first time. "Care to load up from my pouch?" he inquired.

I thanked him and repeated the old story about the Scotchman who confessed that he hated to borrow tobacco because he always crammed his pipe so full that it wouldn't draw. Astley was kind enough to laugh and we fell to discussing pipes and tobacco. Sociable stuff, tobacco. Then we talked of fly-fishing and sailing and dogs; he bred wire-haired terriers. We yarned for the best part of an hour after which I ordered a couple of gin *pahits*, then we went below to change for the evening.

He was on deck when I came up from dinner. On a small table at his side stood coffee and brandy for two

and with an amiable lift of his eyebrows he invited me to join him.

Bridge tables were soon filled on all sides of us and, as only too often happens, partner began upbraiding partner. There were a lot of irritable and senseless post mortems. Several times I noticed my companion fidget in his chair and frown. Suddenly he said, "Let's drink up and go for'ard! I can't stand this."

When we were alone he said, "That silly squabbling gets on my nerves. They're none too good anyhow. White people are usually unpleasant—not nearly so decent as Malays. I much prefer the latter."

I felt that this was said in a fit of peevishness and let it pass. Just the same, it stuck in my mind because I had already noted his apparent preference.

Between Astley and myself a real friendship soon developed. We spent a lot of time together and, at his suggestion, I relinquished the seat allotted to me in the dining saloon and teamed up with him at his side table. He piloted me about wherever we went ashore—Samarang, Soerabaja, Bali, Makassar and so on—all of which he knew well. More than once I tried to draw him out about himself by remarking on his knowledge of these places, but I learned nothing except that he had lived out this way, which was obvious.

He told me much about the beauties of Banda, but nothing could have prepared me for the breath-taking splendor that met my eyes when I stepped out on deck early one morning. Through the lifting night mist we

were approaching a narrow passage between an immense volcanic mountain and the island of Banda Neira. The blue of the water was so incredibly vivid, the green of the densely verdured hills was so brilliant, the outlines of the volcano were so symmetrical, that the very perfection of nature's workmanship gave the scene an appearance of artificiality.

Soon we were steaming through the passage, and ahead I could see a white beach, white houses dotted amongst the plantations, and a series of medieval fortifications on a steep hill.

"Rather good, isn't it?"

I turned at the sound of Astley's crisp voice.

"Superb!" I agreed.

"It's the paradise of the East, the Enchanted Isle. And the women of Banda—! But you've heard about them?"

I shook my head.

"They're famous for their beauty. Always have been. They say the houris in Mohammed's garden came from here—nymphs of perpetual youth, created from musk and spices. . . . Why don't you stop off a few days? There's another boat in a week and I'll show you around. I'm lonesome as the devil and— I wish you would."

I had no serious intention of breaking my trip when I went ashore but Banda intrigued me and Astley's arguments eventually prevailed. It was indeed a slumbrous paradise, an island of memories, and its history was both quaint and tragic. Once it had supplied the world with

nutmegs and mace—the business was a monopoly then and jealously guarded by the Dutch. No fertile seeds were permitted to leave the shores and the plantations paid fabulous profits. Those bold Dutch planters lived in state and luxury: they built mansions, there were banquets and balls and gaiety. Remains of the old houses are still standing, their marble floors and stairways cracked, their bronze gates blackened and broken, their gardens overgrown.

With the passing of the monopoly prosperity fled, but the stout stone forts, the underground passages used for centuries as protection to women and children against marauding Portuguese and Arabs still remain. The whole place dozes now, dreaming pleasantly of heroic days when hardy merchant princes fought for their nutmegs and their ladies.

Those ladies were indeed lovely, from all accounts, for adventurers like these could and did content themselves with nothing less than the choicest of everything. Many of them imported European mistresses—famous beauties who lived extravagantly until they tired of their surroundings and returned home. Needless to say, the blood of Banda was badly mixed. The present inhabitants, predominantly Malay, had inherited characteristics peculiar not alone to the Dutch, but also to the other strains so oddly mingled in their make-up—French, Spanish, Greek, Arabian. There was fire in them and that golden age had stamped them with a certain beauty all their own. If I cared to hear a story about the women of

Banda, my new friend promised to tell me one. Her name was Jafra. He pronounced it softly, that smile curled his lips, a light glowed in his eyes. He had never told it to anybody but—well, I might be interested.

When I assured him that I was interested, he asked if I'd mind getting up early the next morning and going with him. I readily agreed. It seemed I was to make the acquaintance of this lovely Jafra.

We put up at a quaint hotel, a rambling affair with vast, airy rooms and a luxuriant garden. The half-caste proprietor knew my companion as did many of the Arab storekeepers and others. All greeted him with smiles and salaams.

We roamed about together most of that day and the spell of the place fairly drugged me: that evening we lay on long chairs and languidly watched Banda by moonlight. Nothing more heavenly do I ever expect to see. Here was enchantment.

A long *prahu*, manned by a score of coolies each armed with a short, spade-like paddle, awaited us when we walked down to the dock after an early breakfast. The water, as deeply blue as any cornflower, was without a ripple.

Astley and I found seats under a small grass awning astern, then with short strokes in time to a sort of crooning from first one then another, our boatmen propelled us across the bay. On every side was scenery which no poet in his most extravagant moments of inspiration could adequately describe.

"It's a pretty long story," Astley began with some diffidence, "and there's no finish and no end to it. But life is like that, isn't it? Inconclusive, fragmentary, anticlimactic. Real dramas happen only in books. . . . I hope it won't bore you.

"I scarcely know where to begin— Back in the old war days, I fancy. . . . Yes. . . . I was engaged to a girl I'd grown up with, and very much in love with her. We got married just before I left for France towards the latter part of 1914. I had a great pal—we were company commanders in the same battalion for a while—who was seconded eventually to permanent home duty after having an eye shot out on the Somme. I asked him to look after my wife and take her about a bit. Rather foolish of me, as it turned out. Just before the armistice I got a letter from her—a brutally frank document—saying she had closed up our cottage in Surrey and was living with this pal of mine. She explained that they'd become gradually attached, then—things had happened. She had no regrets. Nothing was said about a divorce. She had simply dropped me and gone to someone else. Women acted like that during the war. It shattered them as badly as it did us. Possibly her seeming cold-bloodedness was intended to make me feel that I was well rid of her. Or it might have been her queer, female way of hiding what she really felt. I don't know.

"Anyway, you can imagine how it hit me. To be let down by the two people I thought I could stake my life on!

"I managed to get demobilized soon after peace was declared, but what with nerves pretty shaky from trench life and the shock of this thing I had no heart to settle down to—to anything. Before long I got to hate the sight of England. I was always afraid of meeting those two, and that fear preyed on my mind until one day I up and packed a few bags and boarded a steamer bound for Colombo. Why I chose Colombo I can't say. Maybe I liked the sound of the name.

"From there I drifted up to Calcutta, then across to Rangoon and down through Siam to the Straits Settlements. I was terribly depressed. Eventually, having wandered about through Sumatra and Java—it was now just over six months since I'd left England—I awoke to the fact that I was all but broke. Rather alarming, I confess: it caused me to do a bit of heavy thinking. I realized that I would have to buck up and do something immediately. But what?

"I was in Soerabaja at the time, and being unable to speak either Dutch or Malay I was in a fix. Finally, I decided to go down to Australia and try my luck there. But two things bobbed up to crab that idea. First, I discovered it would cost more than I had left to buy a passage and second, there was no boat going for about three weeks.

"However, through a half-caste tally clerk I happened to know, I learned there was a small Chinese cargo steamer leaving that evening for Amboyna. He arranged a passage for me. From Amboyna I figured I could pick

up a trip on some trading schooner bound for one of the more northerly points of Australia, say Thursday Island or Port Darwin.

"Have you, by any chance," Astley inquired, "ever travelled on a Chinese freighter?"

I told him I hadn't.

"Well," he said, chuckling, "you must try it some time. The boat I went in was carrying a thousand live pigs in crates on the for'ard deck and a full cargo of dried fish below hatches. It was—appalling! It didn't do the least bit of good to shut the port and the door, either.

"Breakfast the next morning was a circus. I forgot to tell you that I was the first white passenger they'd ever carried. All the officers were Chinese, and as I didn't understand a word of their language nor they of mine, we talked in gestures and grunts and smiles. But they were jolly chaps, friendly and anxious to please. About seven of us sat down at table and a steward promptly served each of us with a small bowl containing a banana. From the amused chatter and the self-conscious glances in my direction I saw they were doing their best to put on an English breakfast for my benefit. I tried to show my appreciation by nodding and grinning. That banana was lukewarm.

"Next came weak tea; and then three boiled eggs for each of us. Of course there were no spoons. I was stumped, until the captain solved the problem for me by pinching off the top of an egg and sucking it. Instantly

there came the sounds of hearty vacuum cleaning on all sides.

"Those eggs were hellishly strong and my stomach turned handsprings but I couldn't offend those johnnies—they were doing their best for me.

"What with the food and the smells and the heat and the heavy seas, things seemed about as bad as could be until I woke on the fourth morning with the most terrific headache: I was afire and my tongue felt as big as a horse. I knew I was in for something pretty bad.

"I don't remember much more—delirium set in quickly—but I can recollect that the captain and one of his officers came in to see me and that their voices reminded me of turkey gobblers. They gave me some water and, after a while, I recall being carried down the gangway on a long chair and hoping I wouldn't be dropped.

"Next thing I knew I was in bed in a large room, without the foggiest notion why, how, when or where. I was looking at my surroundings and trying to put two and two together when I noticed a girl, a most bewilderingly lovely creature, sitting at one of the open windows, sewing. Probably it was her chocolate-colored skin—more gold than brown—that put me on the track of things, for it came back to me then that I was somewhere in the Dutch Indies and that I'd been carried ashore from a Chinese freighter loaded with squealing pigs.

"Finally I remembered the war, and the man and woman who'd behaved so rottenly. But somehow those things seemed quite unimportant. I was wonderfully

calm and well pleased with myself. All I wanted was to lie quietly and watch that girl for the rest of my life.

"She looked up finally—her eyes were enormous and fringed with the longest lashes I ever saw. . . . She dropped her sewing and hurried over to my bed. Then she turned and ran out of the room.

"Almost immediately a man appeared—a figure right out of some book of old Eastern tales. He was tall, powerfully built, dark-skinned: he wore a rich purple and orange *sarong*. He was a little past middle age, he had a great big head, a curved nose, a broad chin, and tangled eyebrows that gave him an aspect of fierceness. But when he spoke I was struck by the gentleness of his low-pitched voice. He asked me how I felt and told me his name was Abdul Buraala and that he had the honor of being my host. Then he went on to explain in excellent English that the skipper of the Chinese cargo boat had got the wind up about having a sick white man aboard, and had put me off here at Banda. But there was no longer a hospital in Banda, so he, Buraala, had insisted upon taking me into his house. I'd been there three weeks with a darned bad go of typhoid. Off my nut the entire time except for the past twenty-four hours.

"Presently the local doctor—a little Eurasian—arrived. He went over me, and decided that I was doing all right, and said my recovery was due wholly to Jafra's nursing. At the mention of her name Jafra smiled and curtsied.

"That was a wonderful convalescence. I discovered myself to be in a smallish palace surrounded by acres of

flowers and lawns and huge trees—I pointed the place out to you yesterday, the one with the high white wall round it. Buraala, or rather Said Abdul Buraala to give him his full title, used to sit yarning with me by the hour. A remarkable old boy, the Said. Enormously rich and powerful. This was only one of several places he called home. He could talk intelligently and entertainingly about almost anything under the sun. At first, I was rather uncomfortable at accepting hospitality from a colored man, but that feeling disappeared completely when I found he was a *sahib* in every sense of the word. I wish you could meet him, but he's away now on a trip to Mecca.

"Then, too, there was Jafra. The loveliest, shyest, merriest wild creature. She sat with me in a shady part of the Said's garden and taught me Malay. It was a joy to be with her: she was so good-humored and cheerful and understanding.

"I had assumed she was a member of Buraala's household, he was so fond of her, but she was not. Jafra's father had been a man of some consequence, a trusted employee of the Said's, and the old fellow looked after her along with a hundred others who had a call upon his bounty. Those high class Malays have a code of their own.

"He and I were having a final whiskey and soda one night in what he called his office, a magnificent room filled with books and Oriental treasures, when I told him I was fit enough to move on. He was silent for a mo-

ment; then, after apologizing for seeming to pry into my business, he asked if I'd mind telling him what had brought me out there. I gave him the bare facts; nerves on edge after the war—wandering about the East at a loose end, broke, making my way on spec. down to Australia.

"He was so concerned that I began to regret having mentioned it. It was not wise, he told me, to travel in foreign lands without money, especially when one had scarcely recovered from a severe illness. To my assurances that I was perfectly all right he paid no attention—just sat staring at the ceiling with a troubled expression. He finally asked me if I'd consider remaining in Banda for a time. He could give me a job.

"Frankly, it was a temptation, but I hesitated, for during the last few days I'd begun to realize that there were pressing reasons why I should move on without delay. Jafra was getting under my skin and—I feared she was learning to care for me. All the same, the mention of employment piqued my curiosity.

"The Said, oddly enough, seemed to regret having spoken and it was some time before I could get out of him just what he had in mind.

"Several years before, it seems, Jafra's father while on a trip along the west coast of Dutch New Guinea had bought a number of very large and valuable black pearls. He had surmised they'd been found by New Guinea natives and he came back to Banda much excited. The Said had outfitted a lugger and sent him back to prospect

those waters with the understanding that they would share equally in the profits of his discoveries. He had never returned. Nor had Buraala ever received a hint as to his fate. More concerned at clearing up the disappearance of the old man than in solving the mystery of those pearls, the Said had equipped two other boats and sent them after the first one. Neither had ever been seen or heard of again. All three expeditions had carried experienced crews and divers, too. A thoroughly baffling affair.

"Buraala wondered if I might wish to carry on. The profits, if any, would go three ways, a third to him and me and a third to Jafra.

"We discussed the matter for an hour, and it fascinated me but actually I had come to the point where I dared not trust myself longer near that girl. . . . If I'd been a free man— But I wasn't. Eventually I made the excuse that I was still too weak and rattled to risk the venture.

"I didn't sleep much that night. It galled me to play the weakling before my host: I felt sure I'd fallen in his esteem. Nor could I believe there was any real danger in the enterprise he projected. Those chaps had probably made a tidy haul and run out. Or carelessness had wrecked them. Anyhow, I felt certain I was passing up a good thing.

"I said nothing to Jafra about leaving but the Said must have told her. She was hurt, bewildered, nevertheless she was sweeter than ever, more alluring, more mad-

dening. Every bone in my body ached for her and I had to curb myself with a Spanish bit.

"The night before I was to sail we went for an after-dinner stroll. I couldn't resist one last hour alone with her. The moon was full, as it was last night. I always come back to Banda for this month's moon."

For a while Astley sat staring out across that cornflower sea. "At the far end of the beach we sat down. My Malay was quite passable by then—it's an easy language, you know—and we talked about one thing and another. Mostly about ourselves. . . . I told her about that pal of mine and my wife. Softly she laid her hand on mine and—I fished out a handkerchief as an excuse to avoid the feel of her flesh. . . . She had eyes like a deer. I couldn't bear to face the reproach in them. The pain—

"But I didn't know the women of Banda. Jaфра had some of that old, wild blood in her veins. And the reckless courage of those old Dutch planters, too.

"After a while she said she wanted to swim: she insisted. We had swum often but I said I was too tired. I was really making an honest fight, old man. She was a spoiled, willful little animal, however. What did she do but kick the *spatus* off her feet, peel off her tiny white jacket and gather up her *sarong* so as to form sort of bloomers. Away she streaked into the sea.

"She was like a fish. With pounding heart I watched her sporting about. I was cursing my luck. I don't know how long she stayed there, making up her mind,

but finally, having swum close, she rose and waded towards me through the shallows. I gasped! She was as naked as a statue! The moonlight sheathed her in shining metal. A gleaming, golden nymph, rising out of the sea to frolic on the sand!

"She had determined to hold me here in Banda at any cost and she scorned no weapon that would serve her purpose. These women are like that.

"The next morning she went with me to Buraala while I made a clean breast of everything—I was man enough for that. Jafra was not in the least ashamed of her conduct or of mine, and that took the curse off of the affair, in a way. To her it seemed natural: she was quite delighted with herself.

"The Said behaved much better than I had expected. He's a philosopher. I was glad I'd told him what had sent me wandering.

"I remember he quoted a Malay proverb: 'When God shut up Satan in hell, He created woman to replace Satan on earth,' but he was neither so angry with Jafra nor so offended at me as he pretended to be.

"I told him that I intended to get a divorce and marry Jafra as soon as possible and that if he was still willing I'd head that pearling expedition. Gladly. What's more, I'd claim no share in the profits which were rightly his and hers. Whatever he decided, the die was cast. Jafra was mine and I'd fight the world for her. I was quite stormy and——

"But how I run on.

"Jafra and I sailed away to New Guinea a fortnight later with the Said's blessing. We carried a Malay crew and a diver. For us it was a voyage of supreme delight. The stuffy little cabin of our lugger was a bower, this was our honeymoon.

"I had no feeling of having gone native, or any such rot. On the contrary, I realized that I was a man again; there was peace in my heart, I was contented, I had hope for the future. I was starting a new life and every hour of it bound me closer to that adorable girl.

"She was marvellous, really. Child, woman, wife, sweetheart, siren, watch dog, slave. And as contented as a cricket.

"I can't describe what a thrill I got when we reached the New Guinea coast and the diver got dressed and went over the side. I glued my eyes to his life-line and when, after about half an hour, he came to the surface with three shells in his string bag, I nearly fell overboard from excitement. I pounced on them and opened the things in a jiffy. But there were no pearls in them. My disappointment was terrific. It took me some time to get over expecting to find a handful of gems in every shell I opened—novice's keenness, I suppose—although the Said had told me that as a general thing only about one per cent of them contained anything more than a blob of messy flesh.

"Conditions were ideal for pearl-fishing; clear water and light winds. We were working our way North, picking up a bit of shell as we went. What with this

fascinating job—and Jafra, I'd never been so happy in my life.

“At last I found my first pearl—not much of a thing, but a pearl. That was a big moment. Then I came across others. A couple of them were fairish, but most of the stuff, the diver told me, was just baroque. However, we kept plugging away.

“One evening we found ourselves in water much too deep to anchor in. We could have pulled close inshore, but I didn't want to do that because of the risk of a sudden squall. So I kept on sailing and looking for a safer spot. But for miles and miles along that coast it was the same thing. Beyond two or three hundred yards from shore the water dropped away abruptly to some amazing depth—we couldn't get bottom at all. At last I got fed up and dropped anchor so that the men could get their sleep and be fit for work the next day.

“I was a bit uneasy so I arranged for the crew to take watches and to report instantly if they saw any sign of a blow.

“It had been a long day and I dropped off to sleep like a log. Jafra was a queer, restless little thing: she slept as lightly as some wild animal and lucky for us she did. I felt her tugging at my arm, and awoke to find her standing at the open cabin window staring out. She whispered to me and I leaped from the bunk.

“At first I could make out nothing and I wondered why she clutched me so fiercely and laid her hand upon my lips, then I rubbed my eyes wider open.

"It was glassy calm, a thin haze lay on the water giving the night a blurry, ghostly appearance. What attracted my attention was the fact that in spite of that haze the shore looked much closer now than when I had turned in. It *was* closer. Yes, and we were moving towards it precisely as if those black, scowling hills of mystery—New Guinea is a no-man's land, as you know—were magnets which drew us to themselves. At first I thought my eyes were playing tricks, but Jafra was whispering excitedly: she thrust a rifle into my hand and barefooted, silent as a cat, she pulled me out of the cabin after her.

"There was no doubt about it, as I saw when we reached the deck. That jungle was scarcely a stone's throw distant. I could hear the restless sea whispering upon the shore, I observed, too, that the schooner was headed straight in that direction and moving steadily, if almost imperceptibly. From somewhere in the gloom there was a stir, a stealthy movement, a faint, extraordinary stirring of the waters. The night was alive. . . . It was incredible: it was spooky. I felt my hair rise and my flesh creep. I thought of those other pearling schooners, lost——

"But Jafra gave me no time to think, she drew me towards the bow of the boat. For a moment I could make nothing out of what I saw except that a school of turtles were at play. Or porpoises. Now one showed itself and again several: almost soundlessly they rose and sank. I could hear them fill their lungs. Then I realized

that they were men. Naked men. With black bodies and shocks of fuzzy hair.

"There must have been a dozen of them: they were swimming down and carrying the anchor shoreward a yard or two at a time. It was weird.

"‘Cannibals,’ Jafra whispered. ‘Quick! Before we’re on the beach. Fire and keep firing, while I rouse the crew.’

"She was off like a streak and I began blazing away at those devils. But I couldn’t see the sights of my rifle and it was like shooting at shadows. They were swift: I doubt if I hit any of them but I poured the hot lead wherever I heard a splash.

"With the first roar from my gun, a hellish uproar broke out, the most blood-curdling shrieks of rage I ever heard. The whole mountain-side, as still as a tomb, seemed to rock with the yelling. Plainly it was alive with head-hunters who had been patiently waiting and watching and licking their chops.

"Crafty game, wasn’t it? Too cautious to risk an open attack, they had figured to ground us then swarm aboard as the tide fell.

"We were still in something of a jam for we were in range of their arrows and the air whined with them for a while but we finally got the anchor aboard and our sails up. Slowly we pulled away.

"Jafra was a brick. She was in the thick of things every minute, routing out the crew, hustling them to their work, running to me with ammunition. I’ve told

you all this to show the kind of a girl she could be in an emergency.

"Certainly she had saved us from those awful, damned savages. Some streak of the wild in her had given warning. What I feared most was that she had been grazed by one of those infernal darts—poisoned of course—and I dragged her back into the cabin, lit a lamp and—went over her. I think if I'd found a scratch on her flesh I'd have gone mad and headed back for the shore, hurled myself at those demons— I was weak and sick and shaking when I had finally satisfied myself.

"Well—we kept sailing all the rest of that night, and the coolie who'd gone to sleep on watch got a lovely licking from the diver.

"Next morning we came in and began prospecting near the shore—no diver could have gone down in the deep water farther out—and I need hardly tell you that we kept a keen look-out for visitors. Towards midday I found a black pearl—a beauty. My eyes simply bulged when I opened that shell and saw that gorgeous thing near the lip, all wet and shining and almost alive.

"That decided me to concentrate on this particular bit of coast and my guess turned out right, for while there wasn't much shell what there was of it yielded an unusually high average of pearls; it was what people in the business call 'pearly bottom.' And, for some reason that neither I nor anyone else can explain, the shells more often had black pearls in them than the other kind.

"Every day at sundown we sailed away from the shore,

the tender and I taking turn about to skipper the boat through the night. I was convinced now that Jafra's father and Buraala's vanished luggers had met with the gruesome end which we had so narrowly escaped. The crews had been slain and their heads were blackening in some devilish jungle skull house; the boats burned—not a trace of anything left.

"Eventually, when stores ran low, I headed back for Banda. The memory of that trip will always be with me; the satisfying feeling of something accomplished, warm lazy days, flaming sunsets, moonlight nights—and Jafra.

"The Said was frightfully pleased to see us. He asked Jafra to join us in a threesome dinner although, as you know, Malay women are expected to take their meals after the men. And what a dinner we had! It was more like an old Roman banquet—I wondered if the dishes and the wines would ever stop coming on.

"Afterwards we went to the Said's own sanctum for liqueurs and I continued my report of the trip. Jafra, in a pale pink *sarong* and a small pink ornament in her hair, looked almost too lovely to be real. I could hardly take my eyes off her.

"Buraala was genuinely *susah hati* for those poor chaps who'd gone to their deaths. Jafra he praised for her good work and he gave her, as a memento of the affair, a gold cigarette case with an emerald catch. She was delighted.

"Afterwards, when we came to the pearls and the shell,

he was awfully generous; absolutely insisted on retaining only a third interest. The rest was for us. Then he asked if I'd care to go into partnership with him to work the New Guinea Coast on a bigger scale—a proposal I'd been hoping for—and I jumped at it. The details were quickly arranged."

Astley paused for a while and appeared to find something of interest in the toe of his shoe. He looked up finally and continued, "Every day I became more devoted to that girl. Perhaps you won't believe that a human being can be perfect but she was. Not only was she unbelievably beautiful, she had the disposition of an angel as well. She knew just when to be larky or serious or affectionate, and she had courage, health, a good mind, everything. I was so happy with her that—well, such things are too good to last."

It was clear to me now why Astley was so partial to Malays and so prejudiced against people of his own color, but I was greatly puzzled about this trip to Banda Lantor. Did he keep Jafra hidden away here? Had some terrible illness left her disfigured? Had she borne them a brood of children of whom he was ashamed?

"Half a dozen times," he said, breaking in on my speculations, "I offered to go back home and get a divorce but she wouldn't permit so long a separation. So we went on as we were, our hearts and minds and bodies in complete harmony. It all seems ages ago now, and yet——"

My companion stopped abruptly as the bow of our

prahu went round and we headed towards a small strip of white beach at the end of Lantor. Presently we grounded gently in shallow water. Two of the crew leaped out and carried us ashore on their backs. I could see no sign of habitation, but as we made our way back over the clean sand and pebbles I caught sight of a hut from which a shrivelled old man emerged. He came hurrying to meet us and we paused to exchange flowery Malay greetings; then Astley moved on again.

Where the beach ended and the dense jungle began we went through a narrow gap and along a few yards of moss-grown path. Suddenly this emerged into an exquisite garden, and my companion halted. That garden covered about a quarter of an acre; part of it was lawn, green and smooth and well cared for. Dotted here and there were hibiscus bushes laden with great red or white bell-shaped blossoms, and small arbors of a trailing vine from which hung innumerable clusters of pink flowers. Entirely surrounding the lawn were beds grown densely with other tropical flowers—dazzling masses of color. On every side towered great forest trees which watched over this strange thing of beauty laid down in their midst. I glanced at the man beside me, he was standing with his hat in his hand.

“Poor Jafra,” he said. “She rests here.”

A long silence followed; he squared his shoulders finally and said, “It’s just over five years since it happened. My very soul died with her. The burial places they have out here are pretty terrible. I couldn’t bear to

think of her among tombstones—she was so gay, so much alive—so I bought this piece of Lantor. It had been our favorite picnic ground—she loved it. It *is* rather fine, isn't it?

"When the ghastly details were over I made this garden with my own hands and put old Kassim here to tend it. Then I cleared out—I couldn't bear to stay.

"Every year I make my pilgrimage as faithfully as the Said makes his to Mecca. A sentimental idea, isn't it?" He smiled apologetically. "I warned you that my story had no beginning and no end. It's just a bit of Life."

A moment later I went back to the beach leaving Astley in his fragrant garden, alone with the spirit of that woman of Banda.

THE CAT MAN



THE CAT MAN

The Cat Man

SOMERSET MAUGHAM once wrote an article, which appeared in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, about the Cat Man. I never saw him myself, but the skipper of a trading schooner often used to tell me about him. With a square-face bottle of gin between us he would describe this strange creature in every detail, and then the two of us would speculate on the man's earlier history. It might have been this or that or the other, but, of course, without some clue, we couldn't arrive at any satisfactory result. Eventually this skipper met a sailor in a Thursday Island saloon who had once been ship-mate with the Cat Man—there had been whispers in the fo'c'sle of a murdered sweetheart. One sultry night, sitting in canvas chairs on the schooner's after deck, we gave our imaginations a little healthy exercise and pieced the story together.

He loved cats. Even on the night when he killed his sweetheart he delayed his get-away long enough to go home for his two pets—a black tom and a one-eyed tabby—for he could no more think of abandoning this pair than an adoring mother could think of leaving her children behind.

He was a hulking man, over six feet tall. His coarse red hair grew low on his forehead and far down the back of his neck, his eyes were round and pink-rimmed, his hands were enormous and the fingers were curved like claws.

His passion for cats had manifested itself at an early age. As a boy he had befriended every dingy stray in his dingy neighborhood: he had stolen milk and food for them, he had hidden them away in little used closets and when his parents were asleep he had often crept out and transferred them to the warmth of his own bed. Many a thrashing he had received for bringing them indoors. What did he want with more cats when the house was over-run with them? his father had asked. But whippings had not cured him and up to the day he left school to go to sea he had collected and cared for every homeless cat he encountered. So it had been ever since, and he was past forty now.

Strange that a person of his vicious habits should be capable of such an affection. Perhaps it was because he himself possessed marked feline characteristics. He was lazy, useless and cruel: he was selfish and wholly incapable of gratitude: despite his bulk he moved with a silent ease and limberness, in his whole body there was not a joint that cracked. Moreover, his lambent, green eyes were quick to glow with rage and he could see in the dark.

A bully, a liar, a thief and a murderer, this man: he made no human friends and yet the wildest alley cat

fawned upon him and broke into purring at his touch.

Returning from the deserted pier where he and Marie had quarreled for the last time he used his few remaining shillings to pay his landlady, called his cats and then with them in the bosom of his jacket and his dunnage bag over his shoulder he made his way back towards the docks, passing down dimly lighted streets that smelt of tarred ropes and apples.

Vessels were loading and unloading in the glare of lights, winches rattled, unbroken streams of hand trucks, each trundled by a sweating man, maintained a rumbling like distant thunder and in the stream thick-set tug boats with their sterns well down, chugged and snorted busily. Moving swiftly and silently and keeping mainly in the shadows the man headed for a certain timber ship which he knew was pulling out that night short-handed. By daylight he was on his way to South America.

Marie had been good to this fellow, she had paid for his meals and his drinks, she had given him money in order to keep him ashore with her. She was the only woman who had ever really loved him—the others had proven themselves to be selfish grafters—and although he had never been able to bring himself to destroy a sick or crippled cat and flew into a rage when people talked about drowning litters of unwelcome kittens, he nevertheless suffered no remorse at having killed her. He had a sailor's superstitions, to be sure, and he was sorry he had knocked her into the water—there was bad luck in that—but to the crime itself he gave scarcely a thought.

Drifting from ship to ship during the next few months, the fear of discovery left him. After all, he told himself, Marie had no relatives in Liverpool: she had come there as a refugee from Belgium and nobody at the laundry where she worked would feel called upon to raise a howl at her disappearance. People were forever disappearing. And at the worst, nobody could prove that he did it.

She had practically ceased to figure in his thoughts when one night he was awakened by a shouting from the bunk above his. "For the love o' Pete," he heard a voice complain, "shut up about your damn' Marie and leave us get a bit of rest!"

The man broke out in a cold sweat. Talking in his sleep! That was odd, when he hadn't been dreaming. What had he said? For a long while he lay awake nervously stroking his two pets with whom he shared his bed. Here was something new. This was dangerous.

On the following day when nobody mentioned the incident he felt somewhat easier.

But twice again on the run to Singapore the same thing happened and a growing fear took possession of him. Dimly at first, and then more clearly a picture fixed itself in his mind—a picture of Marie's vengeful spirit hovering over him at night like an ugly, soft-winged bat. It was the silent beating of her wings that stirred thoughts in his brain and fanned them into words.

While the ship was docked at Singapore something occurred that struck positive terror into him. Following a night's heavy drinking in the red-light district one of

his shipmates told him that he had gabbed a lot about killing a woman. His informant, a rat-faced 'Frisco fellow, warned him to keep his mouth shut in future.

The big man blinked his pink-rimmed eyes and walked away without replying. He was shaken to the core. Blabbing now, with a bit of liquor aboard! What infernal luck! Where was this thing leading him? If it kept up he'd feel a knot under his ear. And he didn't dare ask 'Frisco how much he had said in the pub, either. He decided it was the part of caution to jump the ship, so a few days later he and his two cats were on a vessel bound for Australia.

But Marie was more often in his mind now than previously: slowly she had assumed a definite personality and he began to fear her. To keep from talking in his sleep he tried tying his jaws together as a man does who wishes to break himself of snoring.

He went on another drunk in Sydney and was swaying at the bar of a water-front hotel when he heard a shrill voice screaming into his ear something about "murder", "Marie!" The words partly cleared his addled brain, his fever cooled, and he found an angry woman with a bottle in her hand confronting him. She was the barmaid.

"Get out of here before I crack this over your lousy skull," she shrilled, brandishing her bottle. "Get the hell out! We don't serve no murderers in this place."

Through a fog he stared from the woman to his shipmates and on their faces he beheld unfriendly expressions which alarmed him. Urged by the barmaid's vigorous

arm and equally vigorous epithets he lurched off through the low swing door to the street.

He was in a panic, now, his heart thumped, his knees shook under him.

"I've done it this time," he muttered thickly. "I've let it out, for sure."

Fright had pretty well sobered him by the time he got back to the ship, picked up his cats and his duffle bag and boarded the Newcastle train. As he was borne away, he decided that it had come to a pitched battle between him and his ex-mistress. Obviously she was impotent to harm him when he was himself, but she was amply able and ever ready to pounce upon him when he fell off guard. She was a vindictive wench and bent upon vengeance. Awake he was her master but asleep or drunk they were on even terms and then their souls grappled. . . . Con-vict him out of his own mouth, would she? There was a dirty woman's trick. But he'd fool her. He'd strap his jaws together every night and he'd turn teetotal, damn her eyes!

Nothing less than a superstitious terror, an abysmal fear of the unseen, coupled with his natural cowardice, could have held the man to this purpose for his vitals had been saturated with drink these many years and they demanded it. There were times when he thought he would go mad for a taste of rum. Repeatedly, while he tramped the streets of Newcastle looking for a ship, his feet led him to the doors of some drinking place and inside him an insane craving ten thousand times more

compelling than mere food-hunger or water-thirst, cried out for satisfaction. He ached, his brain was afire, mind and body alike were consumed by rebellious yearnings almost impossible to subdue, but somehow he fought them down.

A boat loaded with coal for the East Indies eventually signed him on and as the grimy old tub wallowed northward he continued to fight that ceaseless battle with his appetites. Here was torture: this was punishment. Marie had shipped with him, as always, and she gloated over his sufferings: he would never shake her off: never again would he be able to slake his thirst. Or if he did she would, in all probability, lead him up the scaffold steps and spring the trap under him. In his mind he cursed her a dozen times a day.

The Great Barrier Reef and Thursday Island had been left behind when thin streamers of smoke began to rise through the deck seams. It was a horrifying sight. Spontaneous combustion had taken place in one of the holds and for two stormy days and nights, while the deck grew hotter and hotter underfoot, the collier crew fought the fire. Then suddenly the vessel listed, her decks bulged and flames burst through with a roar. Amid shouts and confusion the order came to abandon ship and hastily the small boats were provisioned.

The one in which the big man stood was run down from that belching inferno but the sea tore it adrift and he found himself alone, except for his cats. The waves hurried him away and to those aboard he was soon lost

in the darkness. For a long while he could see figures flitting about against the glare but the gale blew him on into the night and finally he could make out no more than a reddish glow upon the horizon, and this suddenly went black.

All that night the lifeboat tossed and tumbled; a terrific deluge broke finally and drenched its solitary occupant but he bailed steadily and when morning brought a change in the weather and the sun came out he dropped exhausted upon the gratings and fell asleep. For the first time in months he slept without tying his jaws together.

His dreams were untroubled and when he awoke to find a long, gentle swell upon the ocean and his two cats frisking over him he experienced a feeling of relief akin to triumph. The lifeboat was seaworthy and it contained an ample store of food and water. What was more, something told him that he had shaken off his ghoul; that he was free. Marie had always been afraid of fire: it was the one thing that provoked in her a swooning terror for she had fled from Belgian flames and even the sight of a flaring match made her shudder.

The man laughed and shook his fist at the empty sky: profanely he voiced his relief.

Then he fed himself and his cats, rigged up mast and sail to take advantage of the sou'-west breeze and spoke aloud to his pets:

"We'll head her north by the sun and stars. There's islands there and we'll raise 'em afore long."

Schools of fish made the surface of the water boil as

they rose in panic from some hidden menace beneath them, long-winged sea birds uttered lonesome cries as they joined in the fray and in the wake of the slowly moving lifeboat the dorsal fin of a cruising shark occasionally appeared.

On the afternoon of the second day a speck appeared upon the horizon which grew slowly, assumed outline and became land.

"We'll make it by dark," he told his cats. "Wonder what the natives 'll be like."

But the wind fell with the sun and it was nearly midnight before the boat grounded on the sand. Heaving the anchor overboard, the man picked up his pets and waded ashore. Dim shapes scuttled past him and disappeared into the sea and he said:

"Turtles! Dozens of 'em! That means fresh meat, whatever happens. Eggs, too."

He deemed it unwise to lie down and fall asleep in these unknown surroundings so he wandered about close to his anchored boat until dawn: then he discovered that he was on a lovely little island. It was a tangled, fruitful place and although many of the tropical trees were strange to him he noted with satisfaction a considerable number of wild oranges, rambutans, bananas, mangoes and the like. One end of the island was stony and bare and this was a breeding place for sea birds. They were present in thousands and they showed no fear of him until his cats sprang upon a nest of newly hatched gulls. Then they rose screaming and circled close, beating the

air with their wings and uttering apprehensive cries. The man laughed and stood by while his animals finished their breakfast.

Overlooking the rookery was a bluff of volcanic rock, a hillock of slag pierced by a cave. He climbed up to it and peered inside but it was a while before he could summon courage to explore its depths. Immediately he did so a nauseating stench greeted him and the place awoke: the air grew thick with little fluttering bodies which streamed past him in clouds. Bats! They brushed his face and neck and his flesh crept. They darkened the entrance, they hung from the roof in solid black masses. He swore at them and slashed them down with his stick. He loathed bats for they reminded him of Marie.

"Filthy, creepy little swine," he cried, covering his face finally and making for the open air. Standing outside the entrance he struck them down as they circled blindly. "Stinking vermin! I'd like to kill 'em all. They ain't like cats. There's nothing human about 'em."

A thorough exploration of the island which occupied him until early afternoon failed to discover any sign that it had ever been inhabited. It was a tiny paradise perhaps two miles in extent and it struck him as strange indeed that natives from other islands had not appropriated it. Probably that was due to the fact that there was no fresh water.

Returning to his boat, he landed his stores, then rigged his sail upon four uprights so that it would catch rain

water. Next he hacked down and trimmed a sapling to which he lashed his shirt and this flag he made fast in the top of an isolated coconut palm. Out of stakes and palm leaves he built a rough shelter and when darkness came he kindled a fire and toasted bacon and boiled a bucket of tea over it. He was extraordinarily well content with himself.

He had been on the island a little over a month when a big *prahu*, blown off its course, hove in sight. He waved his arms and yelled to it until the natives saw him and came within hailing distance, but his shouts, his wild gesticulations set them chattering and they sailed away without coming ashore.

Not until they had faded out of sight did he cease to roar curses after them.

"Well," he said, having by now developed the habit of thinking aloud, "there must be other islands near by or them niggers wouldn't be kicking about. If I knew where I was at and had a compass to go by I could leave whenever I wanted to."

But the more he considered leaving his little domain, the more he dreaded doing so. Marie's restless shade was doubtless cruising the seas in search of him and if she ever found him she would put him through that old familiar torture again. Here he was at peace. Better to be lonesome than to be hanged, he reflected. Perhaps she assumed he had been drowned. In any event, she could haunt this island and be damned to her. What if he did talk in his sleep when there was nobody to hear

him? . . . He wished he had a jug of rum and could go on a big drunk. A man needed a good drunk about once a month. But for that matter, there were coconuts, by the thousands, and a hot sun to ferment their juices. He'd manage to make out on that score.

After mature consideration he decided to stay where fate had tossed him and he would have taken down his shirt, now whipped by the wind to a frayed rag, only for two things. First he was running short of flour and tobacco, and second that cave in the bluff, he had discovered, contained a valuable deposit of guano. Guano, of course, was as good as gold. No, he was secure here and in a fair way to make himself independent.

A week later he made out a sail on the horizon and again he raced back and forth along the beach to gain attention. The sail grew larger and he finally saw that a small fore-and-aft schooner was bearing down upon him. It penetrated the reefs and dropped anchor, then a dinghy with two drill-clad white men and a couple of coolies in it came ashore.

The white men stepped out on the beach eyeing with surprise and speculation the ragged, hairy giant who awaited them with a purring house cat in his arms and another rubbing its arched back against his legs.

"Ahoy, there!" said the smaller of the two visitors. "How are you, stranger?"

"Not too bad," the castaway answered.

"Not too bad! You don't look none too damned good! How'd you get here?"

"It don't matter how I got here."

"Righto!" the other declared resentfully. "It's all one to me if you came on your yacht or swam down from Russia for the exercise."

The big man blinked his pink-rimmed eyes, the visitors stared at him silently for a moment. Then the last speaker resumed: "Now look here, Robinson Crusoe, I'm Skipper Jarvis of that trading schooner—the *Flora*. Some natives came into Tenimber a few days back with a yarn about a white man on this island and I've wasted forty eight hours lookin' you up. I'm headed for the New Guinea coast. Get aboard and I'll drop you at Port Moresby."

"Thanks, Cap'n, but I'm goin' to settle here."

"Here?" Skipper Jarvis passed a hand over his Captain Kettle beard and looked meaningly at his supercargo. It was plain he thought this fellow had suffered a touch of the sun. "In Gawd's name, what d'you want to settle here for? Were you thinkin' of layin' out a race track or maybe openin' a store?"

"No. I've found a tidy bit of guano and I had a mind to work it if I could get somebody to call in every so often and take it away. Come and look it over and I'll make a deal with you."

After a short discussion, Jarvis and his companion followed the castaway along the beach to the bat cave and inspected it. When this was done the captain admitted, "It might pay to pick this up. Suppose I find you a

partner to keep you company and some niggers to help you work it?"

"I don't want no company," the man asserted sullenly. "And I don't want no niggers, either."

"Why, you'd go off your blinkin' rocker in no time, livin' alone in this Gawd forsaken place," the super told him.

"Not me. I've had too much company as it is. I don't like people. I'll be all right."

They argued with him further but he held his ground.

"Have it your way," the skipper agreed at last, "we've got to be gettin' on. I can put in here every sixty days for shipments. How's that?"

"Good."

"And I can put ashore what you'll need till my next trip—canned stuff, kerosene, candles, clothes, tools and some empty sacks. I'll bring a bit of lumber for a proper shack if you can make out in the meantime. Anything else?"

"Tobacco. I want——"

"Oh, sure!"

"And I need a gun and some ca'tridges."

"Right. How about a drop of liquor?"

The man hesitated, he licked his lips and a greedy light flickered into his eyes, but he managed to refuse. He knew only too well that he would be unable to resist it if it was at hand and he dared not risk even one drink with strangers about.

The stores were landed as promptly as might be and

debited against the man's first shipment, but when asked for his name he said harshly:

"What the hell—? Call me anything." Whereupon Jarvis shrugged and entered him in the *Flora's* books as The Cat Man.

Before the schooner left, the man voiced one other request:

"I say, Cap'n, fetch me some more cats, will you?"

"Cats?"

"Cats is all I care for. Don't forget. Any kind at all, so long as they'll meow."

As the sun, resembling a huge red poker chip, sank below the horizon, the anchor chain squealed through the *Flora's* hawse pipe, her canvas fluttered and she slid out between the reefs.

The man went about his work with a feeling of triumph: he laughed and he whistled and he talked to his cats. One of the first things he did was to scrape the ship's name from his lifeboat—it was well to completely cover up his tracks—then he made himself some so-called grog by fermenting a quantity of coconut juice and when he deemed it fit to drink he indulged himself in a spree. It was a lusty one: he yelled and he capered in the sand, he staggered up to the gull rookery and flung rocks at the birds, he destroyed their nests, and trampled the downy fledglings under his feet. He cursed Marie, too, at the top of his voice. He invented jeering epithets to hurl at her.

He was sick for a day or so after his debauch but he

slept this off and then, much relieved in soul and in body, he began to dig his guano.

In due course the schooner returned with lumber and fresh supplies but it was not in these that the hermit took his principal delight: he had eyes at first for nothing except the five new cats which it had brought. They were wild, half-starved creatures, picked up at native villages, but he stroked them, talked to them until they purred with pleasure.

Jarvis was disappointed at the amount of fertilizer he found sacked, for he had an eye to profits and investigation had proven that he had stumbled upon a good thing here, but when he suggested landing a couple of coolies to help with the work the man gruffly refused. Jarvis pressed the point and the man flew into a rage.

"It's my island," he bellowed, "and I'll run it like I please. I won't have you nor your stinkin' coolies on it, understand? And you can tell anybody you see to keep off. I've got a gun and I'll use it. See?"

This outburst both surprised and offended the skipper, for a moment he considered telling the man to go to blazes and of refusing to call back, but he could not well afford to cut off what promised to be a profitable trade so he scratched his prominent Adam's apple, shrugged and walked away.

The *Flora* came and went thereafter at regular intervals, and people as far as Port Moresby heard about The Cat Man. To them, and especially to the members of

the schooner's crew, he remained a mystery and a recurring topic of conversation.

Three years went by. Those cats had bred until the island was overrun with them and doubtless because life there peculiarly suited them they grew to an unusual size. Everywhere the man went they followed him: it was a strange sight to see him striding about surrounded by his pack and although they fawned upon him and he could do anything with them, they were unfriendly to his visitors. For a while they hunted their own food, wreaking such havoc with the birds that they finally migrated. Even the bats they destroyed. They monopolized the man's shack, they stole his food, unexpected litters of kittens were forever turning up and when there was nothing left on the island for them to hunt he was forced to find food for them.

Fortunately this was no difficult task for there were many turtles. During certain seasons, these monsters came ashore at night in pairs and while the females crept up beyond high water mark to lay their eggs, the males remained near the water's edge on guard, ready at the approach of danger to signal a warning and scuttle back into the sea with inglorious haste. By heaving these creatures over upon their backs and leaving them to paw helplessly until he was ready to chop them up the man secured food for his four footed friends. When he occasionally ran short of turtle meat, it was an easy matter to catch fish.

There was a large quantity of guano in that cave and

Jarvis resented the slowness with which it was being dug: several times he and the man had words about it but there was nothing the skipper could do. He was afraid of the great hairy fellow and of his pets too. In truth he had almost as good reason to distrust the one as the other for one day a coolie trod on a sleeping cat and it turned on him and clung to his leg, clawing and biting, until its owner pulled it off.

At night as Jarvis and the super-cargo sat on deck playing their phonograph and drinking whiskey and sodas they often discussed the Cat Man and his peculiarities.

"It ain't natural," the skipper would say. "You'd think any man would at least want a woman to make a bit of a fuss over him. But not him. And there's plenty of these dusky girls would jump at the chance to queen it on this island. As I figure it he's in hiding."

But this was not the super's idea. "There's more to it than that," he declared. "There may be a price on him, like you say, but I've an idea he's found pearl shell in the shallow water and he's layin' away a fortune." The speaker was possessed of a romantic South Sea imagination and he had once done a little pearling. "That's why he's so scared we'll slip ashore and spy on him; that's why he won't use any help with his guano. He just digs enough to keep us coming. Mark my words, he'll pull out some day with maybe a million pounds on him and give us the laugh. There ain't any other explanation to it."

"Damn him! And after all we've done for him, too! If it wasn't for that gun of his and them cats I'd find out, but—I'd sooner land at night among them New Guinea head-hunters than risk it here. Them squalling devils would tear a man to ribbons."

The super-cargo nodded.

Feeling his old thirst coming on him, as it did periodically, The Cat Man one day brewed himself another batch of fermented poison and when it was ready he made a beast of himself as usual. His spree lasted nearly a week and for several days thereafter he paid the penalty. But this time he did not succeed in sleeping off his nausea: on the contrary he grew sicker, if anything.

There came a morning when he could not stand on his feet. It enraged him to find himself in this condition for he had never known a day's serious illness. He forced himself to rise and gulp down first one then another of the scanty remedies left behind by the super-cargo. But they only made him vomit the more.

Coming out of a long sleep it occurred to him that he had not fed his cats. He felt as badly as ever but managed to get as far as the meat box outside and heave its offensive contents to the waiting animals.

By the next morning his fever had increased but he felt less concern for himself than for his cats—he'd be all right in a day or so. Their hungry meowings distressed him and his turtle meat was all gone. He crept out of bed and opened tins of bully beef and fish for them, feeling some alarm at the quantity required to go

around. However, he couldn't let the poor things suffer.

He lost track of time then: he slept some, occasionally a delirium overcame him and he was back in Liverpool with Marie. Once he summoned the strength to rise and hack open his remaining tins of meat and cast the contents to his cats, then he fell back into bed.

How long his illness continued he did not know but his rugged constitution triumphed finally, it threw off the effects of the poison he had imbibed and one morning he awoke clear-headed. The sun was shining brightly and yet, oddly enough, a tempest was raging. He listened for a while, then he opened his swollen eyes wider. That noise was not the wind, it was the snarling of his cats. He turned his head and saw that the cabin was full of them, they were coming and going through the open door and they were thin, restless. A huge tom cat sat on a bench near his bed and stared at him fixedly, its tail twitching nervously.

"Poor old fellow!" he said. He reached out his bare arm and stroked it. The animal licked his hand for a moment, then without warning or provocation it sunk its teeth and its steel-like claws into his flesh.

The man yelled and shook it off, with his fist he knocked it to the floor. The cat landed upon its feet and crouched, staring at him out of burning, yellow-green eyes that had suddenly grown ravenous. It licked its lips and growled, the nervous movement of its tail increased.

The man's hand and forearm were bleeding, but he

felt too weak to rise and wash them so he lay where he was and staunched the blood with his bedclothes.

"Damned ungrateful beast," he muttered. "I'll pay you off for this." He glared at the offender only to discover that every pair of eyes in the room was fixed upon him: the animals watched him with an eager, unblinking intensity. More cats slipped in through the door, and he noticed with a shock how thin and gaunt they had become. Then a ghastly fear took slow possession of him: he felt himself growing cold and faint. His pets! It must have been days since he had fed them and they had turned against him. They were sitting here waiting for him to die.

He yelled at them furiously and waved his blanket but they shrank back only slightly and soon edged closer. From outside came a plaintive meowing and in the doorway appeared a huge female followed by a litter of complaining kittens. The mother cat was a rack of bones, her teats were shrunken but when she came to a pause the kittens seized them avidly and she cuffed them aside. She, too, fixed a disconcerting stare upon the figure in the bunk.

With an effort The Cat Man raised himself and swung his bare legs over the edge of the bed. He'd have to drive them out of the shack while he was able, and close the door. He should have known better than to leave it open. Ravenous devils! Waiting for him to croak! And that old tom, biting the hand that fed it! It was the first time in all his life that a cat had turned upon him.

Well, he'd get his stick and lay it on 'em, break their legs, give 'em something to squall about.

He lurched to his feet and seized the staff he sometimes used then swung it viciously.

Bedlam broke loose. There was a spitting and a growling, a scuttling rush as the animals somersaulted over each other to escape him. One of them screamed in agony and the man shouted:

"Serves you bloody well right. Get out! *Scat*, damn you!"

In a wave they surged about the room ahead of him, snarling, squalling, fighting with each other. They were pets no longer.

Suddenly the man felt his knees buckle under him, then the floor rose up and stunned him. . . . A trickle of blood ran from his injured hand and stained the floor.

The *Flora* came to anchor late one night under a low yellow moon but not until dawn did Jarvis and his supercargo row ashore. As they left the schooner the skipper inquired:

"Say! Did you hear them devilish cats last night?"

"Rather! They kept me awake. How that bloke stands it I don't know. I'd go off my blinkin' nut."

"Sounded like they was eatin' each other up. Lord! It was enough to make a body's blood run cold. . . . I say, where's the boss this morning?"

When the boat grounded and The Cat Man had not appeared, the captain uttered a loud hallo. He repeated

his call without result, whereupon his companion cried excitedly:

"What did I tell you? He's pulled out with his treasure. Strike me pink if he hasn't put it over on us, just like I said he would."

Together they made their way towards the cabin.

"What's happened to all the cats?" Jarvis inquired as they drew near the house. "There don't seem to be half as many—" Then he uttered an oath. "No wonder it sounded like they was eatin' each other up. That's just what they were doing."

"The dirty swine!" exclaimed the other man. "Leavin' them poor animals behind to starve. He'd ought to be arrested."

Again Jarvis called to the hermit, then receiving no answer he entered the open cabin door. He halted so suddenly that the super collided with him: in horror they stared at what lay revealed.

The skipper backed out finally and closed the door, his face was the color of chalk.

"Gawd Almighty!" he said in a weak, shocked voice. "This is horrible."

The super, who was clinging sickly to a palm tree, nodded his head. "Ain't it? And—he loved cats."

RAEL MONTGOMERY



LAVA

III

Lava

I CAN never think of Soerabaja without seeing in my mind a man who, for sheer strength of personality, beats everything else I have ever encountered. When I conjure up a picture of any part of that town this man is always in it. His name was Rael Montgomery.

Soerabaja, situated, as it is, close to the extreme south-eastern tip of Java, is the point where the East may be said to end. Beyond are the spicy islands of the Dutch East Indies, the "outer possessions," so-called. Beyond them again are the countless reefs and atolls and volcanic peaks which make up that vast and trackless area loosely known as the South Seas. Soerabaja is a fascinating, cosmopolitan town; a strange composite of the tropics, of the Orient and of Continental Europe. It is a city of contrasts. It is reached by a filthy twelve mile canal crowded with tugs and sampans, lined with "godowns" and electric cranes: in the harbor itself ocean liners, rimed with the salt of many seas, rub sides with odd-looking *prahus* and native craft of outlandish design many of which bear picturesque red-brown sails. In the streets of the city pongee-clad white men go about their business brushing shoulders with Malays, Chinese, Arabs,

Japanese and half-breed mongrels of those and many other races. Lumbering carts, piled high with coffee, copra, rubber or sugar, and drawn by patient water buffaloes or humped-back oxen creak over the hot roads, smart motor cars whizz past with discordant warnings from their brazen horns, diminutive Deli ponies hitched to little closed carriages hardly larger than toys scamper through the turmoil, their harness bells incessantly jangling. On the sidewalks are native vendors of fried rice neatly wrapped in banana leaves, unspeakably sickly drinks, tawdry knick-knacks made in Japan or Germany; kris peddlers selling wicked, serpentine-bladed Malay knives, and barbers perilously cutting hair with razors. On the better streets there are cafes in front of which men and women of many nationalities sit at small tables under striped awnings drinking coffee and gin *pahits*.

Soerabaja is a place of clashing colors, conflicting customs, crossed bloods and mixed motives, a town where the weird is commonplace and things extraordinary occur every day. Anything can, and most things do, happen in Soerabaja, so it is said.

Java itself is a land of contradictions and of phenomena strange to European eyes. Majestic temples, lost and forgotten for centuries in the dark remoteness of dripping jungles, sand seas that stretch for miles in rippling, blinding undulations; flying cats, musical worms, bird killing spiders—these are a few of the sights the stranger hears about. Volcanic forces raised the island, they have devastated and they have fertilized it. Volcanic passions

play among its polyglot people, and the monsoon blows upon them.

The most colorful, the most provocative personality in the whole of this colorful, seething town of Soerabaja was Rael Montgomery. Men envied and respected him, women were secretly enamored of him, everybody talked about him.

Several factors contributed to the unusual amount of interest displayed in Rael Montgomery. To begin with, he was strikingly good-looking, if one cared for his type. In the middle thirties, he was tall and lean, with a heavy chin, a straight nose, sensitive nostrils, piercing brown eyes, and a distinctly sensual mouth. His least pleasing feature was his peculiar eyebrows; they were finely pencilled but extraordinarily thick and black and they were uplifted at the outer ends. They were Mephistophelian eyebrows and they lent a distinctly sinister and mocking expression to Montgomery's entire face. Some people declared they gave away the character of the man himself but this opinion was by no means general and certainly there were few women who did not find him vastly intriguing. He was always immaculately clad in well-fitting white against which the deep bronze of his face and strong tapering hands showed up in sharp contrast. Aside from the above, he was the most brilliant man in his profession—the law. His services were eagerly sought after whenever an important case arose: people hurried to him with their business for fear he would represent the other side and his unfailing success in the

courts was uncanny. But the main reason for his being the topic of so much discussion was his peculiar remoteness. He made no friends, he took no part in the social life surrounding him, he lived entirely within himself. Luncheon or dinner invitations were never accepted or declined for the simple reason that they never reached him. He offered no kind of hospitality whatever and yet nobody thought of him as a *poseur*; it was merely taken for granted that he did not feel the need of human companionship and, in consequence, his wishes were respected.

Even his exercise he took alone. In the early mornings, before the sun was too hot, he would ride out of his compound on one of his well-groomed Walers and go cantering off by himself. When he could get through his work at the office in time, he would jump into his car, pick up his head house-boy, a Malay named Batjo Sembilan, who had been in his service for many years, and drive down to the harbor where he kept a fast motor launch. Away they would go—just the two of them—far out to sea. There Rael would strip, plunge overboard holding on to the end of a long rope, the other end of which was made fast to a cleat in the launch, and allow Batjo to tow him at a rapid pace through the luxuriously warm water. In a climate as enervating as that of Soerabaja exercise more vigorous than riding or bathing takes it out of a man.

Returning to his city club after this pastime he would walk briskly up the well-raked path through the lawn

to the clubhouse, nod affably but without enthusiasm to fellow members, drink a long whiskey and soda in the breeze of a punkah, then drive off home. That was about as much as any of his club-mates ever saw of him.

Some talk concerning him invariably followed his departure:

"Queer bird," somebody would say. It was not necessary to mention the object of this remark.

"Yes," another would reply. "Beats the devil how he keeps to himself. Hasn't got a real friend in the world—and apparently doesn't want one. Do you suppose he'll ever marry?"

"Never."

"He might, at that."

"Oh, who can tell anything about *him*! He's hard to understand. All the same, I wish I had half his ability."

"Perhaps he's got a wife tucked away in some part of the world."

"That's possible, of course—but even so I don't see why he treats all the women like dirt under his feet. Most men wouldn't if they were in his shoes." This with a meaning nod.

"And he doesn't have anything to do with the Malay girls, either. Some of his servants would certainly talk if he had anyone at his bungalow, and there's never been even the vaguest rumor."

"It's this business of having himself towed all over the bally place that gets me. And the sea alive with sharks and crocodiles! His theory that they won't come near a

fast-moving launch may be all right, but he can test it out for himself. None of that for me. Those big 'crocks' wouldn't need to make two bites of a man."

"He's been doing it for years. And nothing ever——"

"Oh, let's chuck gossiping about the fellow and have another drink. We spend half our time discussing him—and what's the use? Call him a mystery and let it go at that."

This strangely unsociable man lived alone in a large white bungalow surrounded by several acres of well-kept compound in the choicest part of the residential quarter. Velvety green lawns sloped away from the house, the garden paths were bordered with gay coxcombs, crotons and ground orchids, and here and there, like dignified sentinels guarding their master's seclusion, were tall graceful palms, flame trees, and red and white hibiscus bushes. High, thick hedges on all four sides of the grounds gave the place an austere air curiously in keeping with its owner.

The bungalow was filled with treasures. Rael had inherited some, others he had bought in India and China and during his trips to Europe; paintings, etchings, rugs and old silver. He was a keen judge, as well as a collector of these things. The walls of his study were lined with books, rare editions and original manuscripts, and in a corner of the room stood a piano which he played with a fine touch and depth of feeling. In the cool of the evening Brahms, Liszt, Beethoven floated out over the flower-scented air of his compound. Passers-by

stopped and listened—and wondered about the man within.

The Montgomery family had lived in Soerabaja and had possessed money for several generations. Rael's grandfather had come there from Scotland towards the middle of the last century, amassed a sizeable fortune in sugar, and married a half-caste Arab woman, a rare beauty, so it was said. His own father had further developed the family wealth and died of dysentery shortly after Rael, an only child, returned from Europe where he had been educated. He had never known his mother who had not long survived his birth.

At the law courts Rael got through his cases with amazing speed and sureness. He represented the largest exporting companies and steamship lines and likewise many of the rich planters of the back country, especially those who were in need of an attorney more than usually adroit and one who was less pliant to the spirit than to the letter of the law. This is not to say that Montgomery was crooked, nobody even called him unscrupulous: they merely admitted that he was a master of craft and subtlety and that he had a genius for legal technicalities.

The most anybody found to say about him was that he was "too damned clever" or that he was at heart an Arab. What could be expected of a fellow who was not "all white"? Even in appearance the man was a throw-back. Needless to say these critics were not clients of Montgomery's; more often they were people who had failed to hire him.

If these criticisms reached Rael's ears, they made no visible impression upon him. He carried on as usual, winning whatever causes he undertook. Defeat remained in his eyes a disgrace and victory he accepted as a matter of course. He was considered the most powerful man in Soerabaja and it became a question whether he was stronger than the law or whether the law was stronger than Rael Montgomery. There were times, too, when he showed a ruthless daring and a lofty Arabic contempt for the restrictions and the red tape of his profession.

When, in due course, he returned from a trip abroad and brought with him a wife, an extremely handsome Russian woman some ten years younger than himself, it was assumed that his method of living would undergo a radical change. Gay dinners, dancing, tea and cocktail parties on the lawn of the Montgomery bungalow were visualized. But nothing of the sort happened. Apart from making and receiving the usual introductory duty calls Vera Montgomery turned out to be as inaccessible as her husband. She also made no attempt to mingle with those around her. People waited, speculated, chattered.

The newcomer was charming to those with whom she occasionally came in contact, but she plainly showed that she shared Rael's antipathy to social life, and, strange as it may seem, both she and he were able to go their own ways without becoming disliked. There was a certain

ingenuousness about the couple which tempered what otherwise might have been regarded as arrogance.

Of course, from the first moment of her arrival, there was much speculation as to Vera. Where had Rael met her? Had he known her before or was it on this last trip that they'd first met? Who were her people? For what reason did she dislike and distrust strangers? Was there some secret in her life? But these questions remained unanswered.

On the point of Vera's beauty there was unanimous agreement. She possessed a slim, supple figure and was rather above average height. Her skin was alabaster, her eyes were green, her hair was a deep auburn. The vivid color of her mouth looked like a splash of blood on clean snow. Almost always she wore green clothes and emeralds—they went well with the curious color of her eyes. She was a tempestuous, passionate creature: she had a Tartar temper.

It was patent to everyone that she and Rael were much in love. They spent most of their time together—quite oblivious of outsiders. She rode with him in the mornings, drove him to his office, and often went out in the launch in place of Batjo Sembilan to tow him through the water. They were admitted to be the handsomest couple the town had ever known and its inhabitants were proud if somewhat envious and critical of them.

It was during the third year of the Montgomery's marriage that Gerald Boyce-Gordon arrived in Soerabaja. He had come down from the Federated Malay States to

manage a coconut plantation owned by a wealthy local Dutchman. Boyce-Gordon, a typical public-school Englishman and heir to an old baronetcy, was about thirty—a genial, sociable, forward, self-assured fellow. There was nothing remarkable about his appearance, but he had rather nice wavy brown hair, a well-knit athletic frame, pleasant features and manners and somehow or other women took to him instinctively. Because he was amusing and danced and played excellent golf and tennis he fitted quite neatly into the town's general scheme of things.

He had been there several months when he was seen one afternoon to arrive at the club in Rael's car. The two men spoke a few words before Rael drove away.

Raised eyebrows greeted Gerald as he joined the little group of men at the bar.

"So we drive about with the great Montgomery now," said one. "We're getting on, eh?"

"How in the world did you come to be in *his* car?" asked another.

"I was on my way here when I had a puncture," Gerald explained. "And while the syce was changing the wheel Montgomery pulled up and offered me a lift. I'll admit I was a bit surprised, and flattered—I'd only spoken to him once before."

"Damned funny," said the man who had first spoken. "He'd have passed us by without a look."

"Of course, I know all about his rummy reserve," Gerald answered, "but I don't really see what else he could

decently have done except pick me up. And I must say he was cheery and human enough as we drove along—chatted away like a magpie.”

“Well, you’d better remember what he said because it’s probably the last word you’ll ever get out of him.”

This remark, however, proved to be entirely wrong, for a few evenings later Rael approached Gerald on the club lawn and asked him to have a drink. After that had been disposed of he turned rather suddenly and said: “Are you booked for dinner?”

“No,” Gerald answered.

“Perhaps you’d care to come along and have a bite with us. I wish you would.”

There was nothing Gerald could do but accept although it embarrassed him to be singled out in this manner. He knew that the Montgomerys never entertained and this invitation made him feel uncomfortably conspicuous. A few minutes later he and Rael strolled out of the building and drove away.

The perplexed eyes of male and female members had followed them as they left and comments were freely exchanged as soon as the pair were out of earshot.

That proved to be the beginning of a friendship extremely puzzling to the European colony of Soerabaja. Rael and Gerald became inseparable. They rode, drove, drank, dined together; in fact, one was seldom seen without the other. Not that Vera was in any way ignored: she spent as much time as before with her husband. It

was simply that the Montgomery party had developed into a threesome.

So far as anyone could see there was no reason why Rael should have taken to Gerald. Each had been to Oxford, but not even at the same time, so that fragile bond could not possibly account for it. Friendships, after all, are not founded upon reason, they spring from impulse.

This phenomenon of a man, who always had lived in remote seclusion, suddenly plunging into an intimate association with an utter stranger naturally gave rise to much conjecture. Would it last? What had brought about this sudden change in Rael? Had he become bored with his wife's undiluted company? Would Vera commence making friends now that her husband had broken the ice?

As the months went by and the Montgomerys showed no sign of changing their method of living, except that they appeared to have permanently attached Gerald, the affair was less talked about. The trio became an established fact. Gerald's status, apparently, was that of a brother to both of them and he now used the Montgomery bungalow as if it were his own—dropped in to meals whenever he felt like it, spent week-ends there, drove out with either or both of his friends after dinner, and often went towing in the launch with Rael. First one would steer the launch while the other clung to the rope, then they would change about.

The final seal was put on the friendship between Rael

and Gerald when the latter quarreled with the Dutchman whose plantation he managed. Rael insisted on his telling the old man to go to the devil, and promptly advanced Gerald ample money to start a plantation of his own. At first Gerald flatly refused, and it was only after much persuasion that he accepted.

The next year was the busiest in Gerald's life. He worked like a stevedore and in what must have been record time his new place was cleared and planted. Rael, who always threw his whole enthusiasm into everything he did, admired this quality in others. Slackness or half-heartedness he loathed. Not only was he well pleased with his protégé but also he derived a soothing feeling of satisfaction at having foreseen that the fellow was made of sound stuff. He took an especial pride in his ability to size up men and seldom was he wrong.

Vera and Gerald had driven out in the car one night, as they often did, for a breath of air. It was ten o'clock and Rael sat alone in his study. The room was dark, only Rael's knees and the book he held in his strong, brown hands showed in the disc of light thrown by the reading lamp. Nothing but the monotonous gurglings of tree-frogs and the faint sound of tom-toms in some far-off *kampung* broke the evening stillness. Suddenly the sharp click of the door latch caused him to look up.

Batjo Sembilan, dressed in a blue and gold *sarong* and spotless white coat, came towards him.

"What is it, Batjo?" he asked.

The boy hesitated for a moment; then he dropped to his knees.

"Tuan," he cried. The speaker's voice trembled and he wrung his hands. Rael took a cigarette from the silver box beside him and lit it leisurely to give the boy time to collect himself.

"Now," he said, blowing twin streamers of smoke through his nostrils. "What's the trouble?"

"Tuan, please—there is something I must tell you." Batjo had been educated at a Christian Mission in Amboyna and as a special privilege he was allowed to address his master in English. "You will be very angry with me—perhaps you will kill me, but I must speak."

"Don't be foolish, Batjo. It can't be as serious as all that. Get up on your feet and tell me what's happened." There was a shade of impatience in Montgomery's tone.

Batjo rose but he was shaking. Rael adjusted the reading lamp so that it shone on the boy's face, and waited.

"Tuan, please, it is about the memsahib that I . . ."

"The memsahib!" Rael's eyes blazed suddenly and he gripped the sides of his chair. "Quick! Has something happened to the car?"

"Tuan, no. It is not that."

"Well then, speak up. Out with it before I strangle you!" The speaker half rose in a menacing attitude.

"Tuan, the memsahib—she is not your wife only." Batjo retreated a couple of paces before going on. "She is also Mister Boyce-Gordon's wife."

For perhaps half a minute Rael remained motionless,

staring, then he slowly sank back into his chair. His expression had not greatly changed, there was, to be exact, very little expression upon his face, but if anything his eyes gleamed more fiercely than before. They were terrible eyes. When he spoke it was as if he carefully weighed each word.

"Batjo," he said, "just what do you mean? I think I understand but I want to make no mistake. You needn't fear my anger. Tell me in as few words as possible what you know."

"Tuan," the boy began, now reassured, "I have been in your employ for more than ten years and I have never told you a lie. I would not speak of this matter without being sure. . . ."

"I know. Stick to what you have to say."

"Tuan, it has been going on for a long time. I would have told you but I was frightened. Many times after tiffin Mister Boyce-Gordon has come here and gone to the memsahib's room when the servants were taking their sleep in the coolie lines. It was only by accident that I found out. One afternoon I could not sleep because of a pain in my stomach and I came to the bungalow for some medicine. That was the first time I saw, tuan. They came out of the memsahib's room, whispering and laughing. I stood behind the door in your dressing room till they had gone past. Then I crept downstairs through your bathroom. But before going back to the servants' quarters I peeped through the window of the sitting room. He was lighting a cigarette for the memsahib and

he bent down and kissed her for a long time, tuan. I went away very unhappy because I knew that what they were doing was not right."

In a voice as stony as the look upon his face Rael asked, "Is that all?"

"Oh no, tuan. After that I watched. I did not wish to spy on them, but I was your servant long before the memsahib or Mister Boyce-Gordon came here and I thought it was my duty to learn if they were fooling you."

"You watched. What did you see?"

"Tuan, from my window many times have I seen Mister Boyce-Gordon come quietly up the compound after tiffin. Never in his car—always he walked. Then I have come on tip-toe to the bungalow and listened at the memsahib's door and looked through the key-hole. It is bad. Very bad. You wish me to go on?"

"Go on," said Rael.

As Batjo proceeded haltingly, the ash on Rael's cigarette grew appreciably longer but when eventually it dropped to the rug it was because of no nervous shaking of his hand. He was frozen, petrified. "There is no chance that you imagined all this?" he inquired presently.

"Tuan—! My eyes are your eyes, my heart is yours. You may kill me if you wish."

"Have you spoken to the other servants—to anyone?"

"Never, tuan. It is my master's business."

"Very well! And you have not spoken to me. Do you understand?"

"Tuan!" The boy solemnly bowed his head.

"You may go now."

Long after Batjo had left Rael sat looking into space. Not until he heard the crunch of motor car tires on the gravel path of the compound did he pick up his book and light a cigarette.

A moment later, Vera entered the room, shedding a filmy wrap and switching on the lights as she came through the door. Gerald was at her heels. Her hair had been blown by the wind, her eyes were glowing, her face was alight, there was a youthful buoyancy in her bearing—she might have been some wilful goddess of the jungle.

"Hello, Rael," she cried. "You were foolish to stay indoors. It's a glorious night."

"Yes," Gerald added. "Silly business browsing among your books when you might have been out in the air."

"I was working on a new case," said Rael. "My evening hasn't been altogether wasted."

"Whiskey and soda, Vera?" Gerald asked, going towards a small table on which glasses, decanters and ice were laid out on a heavy silver tray.

"Please, Gerald—a long one."

"Can I mix a spot for you, too, Rael?"

"Not just now, thanks."

Gerald returned from the table carrying two tall drinks one of which he handed to Vera; then, sitting down opposite her, he took a long pull at his glass.

As usual, they chatted about the small things which go to make up peoples' lives—the new horse that had arrived

for Rael that day from Australia, the condition of the plantation, a projected shoot over the week-end. There was nothing unusual in Rael's demeanor, it was not until Vera crushed the end of a half-smoked cigarette in an ash tray and spoke of going to bed that he touched on what Batjo had told him. Speaking quite casually, and at a moment when Gerald was drinking, he said:

"Gerald, suppose you were married and you learned that a man was making love to your wife, what would you do about it?"

Without the slightest haste Gerald finished his whiskey and set down the empty glass on the table beside him; then, feeling his pockets for pipe and tobacco, he answered banteringly:

"My dear old boy, if by any chance you're suggesting that I make love to *your* wife let me tell you that I do and, what's more, I shall continue to do so whenever the opportunity offers. Who could help it? That all right by you, Vera?"

"All right by me, Gerald."

"It might interest you to know," the latter went on, holding a match to his pipe, "that I even went so far as to pat her hand in the car tonight. I may have done it twice—couldn't be sure one way or the other."

Rael paid no attention to Gerald's raillery. "This case is interesting," he went on, "because I don't know just how to advise my client. The wife and the lover have their rights as well as the husband."

"That sounds odd, coming from a limb of the law."

Rael shrugged his shoulders. "What is the law except codified custom, established usage? There's no inherent sanctity to it. The woman has her natural right of selection, the lover has his right to prove his superior strength and courage."

"Survival of the fittest, eh?"

"Precisely. Jungle law, Arab law. Whatever you choose to call it."

"Who am I to argue, especially on a hot night?" Gerald dismissed the subject.

Apparently content, Rael looked down at his book and went on reading, but in the pregnant silence that followed he fancied he could feel the exchange of apprehensive looks between his wife and his friend. He noted that Vera, instead of going to bed at once, as she had spoken of doing, lighted a fresh cigarette; the fact that his query and his statements, made apropos of nothing at all, had been allowed to pass without further comment was not lost on him. After a while he rose and went to the piano. Several times his fingers wandered indecisively up and down the keys and then he commenced to play—Chopin's Fifth Nocturne. He played it divinely.

When he had finished and had closed the piano Vera exclaimed,

"It's getting late, you people. We'll all be wrecks in the morning. Good night, Gerald. And don't kill yourself speeding on the way home."

"*Slamat tidor*," said Gerald, bowing to her. "Good night, Rael."

"Nightho, Gerald. See you tomorrow."

It was comforting to Vera to hear her husband's cheerful adieu to their guest. Perhaps, after all, that sinister question had boded nothing.

She became convinced that such was the case when Rael kissed her good night as usual. All the same, when she got to her room she discovered that she was shaking and that her whole body was cold. Rael was such a peculiar person: she never knew just how to take him or how he would react to a situation for he seldom behaved like other men. That was the Arab streak in him, no doubt. It was more than a mere streak, Vera had discovered; sometimes it seemed to her that he was all Arab. Under his polished European exterior he possessed oriental traits which bewildered and offended her: there was a side to him which she did not know and could never seem to get acquainted with. In some ways he was as much a stranger to her now as he had been before their marriage, and this it was which accounted for her affair with Gerald. So, at least, she assured herself when she took time to think about it and to search for an explanation of her behaviour.

In her mind love meant a passionate surrender, complete and all-embracing: anything less argued indifference and to one of her exacting nature, indifference was intolerable. A ninety per cent proprietorship in anything was to Vera a minority interest and she rebelled against it. Having given her all, it offended her to receive less than all that Rael had to give and her pride

cried out. It baffled and it maddened her never to be able to explore that hidden room in her husband's heart for never before had she suffered frustration. She could not endure the feeling.

Boyce-Gordon was another type altogether and so it was that she had turned to him. Love? She loved them both. She felt sure that she could love Rael as wildly and as selfishly as ever if only he would surrender himself, give up to her, put himself into her power, but always he turned that blind side towards her. It was like a wall and when her nails were bleeding from the effort to scale it she fell back almost hating him.

Lately she had been drifting rather aimlessly but tonight Rael had brought her up with a bump. Yes, and his manner of doing it was an affront. If he really loved her why didn't he show jealousy? Why didn't he blast and wither her? Why didn't he kill Gerald? That's what she would have done, in his place. There was lava in his veins, as she well knew, and she longed for it to scorch her: the fact that it had cooled was an unceasing torment.

Well, she had the power to ignite unholy fires in Gerald. If the truth came out she assumed they'd run away together.

On the following morning she rode as usual with her husband. No mention was made of Gerald either then or at breakfast. From Rael's manner it might have been supposed that he had decided to condone whatever he

had discovered, if anything, and this caused Vera to writhe.

Time and again during the day she was tempted to telephone her lover but caution restrained her. She expected him to call her or to drop in but he did neither.

The afternoon dragged wearily by. It was after six—considerably later than usual—when Rael drove up to the bungalow. Tea had been served in the study and Vera had finished hers but the things were still on the table. Rael kissed her perfunctorily and explained that he had been forced to stop at police headquarters on a matter of business, then he went to one of the French windows which opened upon the lawn and stared out. Plainly he was disturbed and Vera assumed she knew the reason why.

She was voicing some aimless pleasantries when he whirled and faced her: without preamble he broke in:

"You're as lawless and as passionate as I am, and it requires a man to hold you. Not a good man necessarily, but a strong man. If it came to a choice between two men you'd choose not the better but the stronger and the more ruthless."

"Um-m! No doubt. I'm like other women. Yes, I'm lawless, as you say, but what on earth——?"

"Since last night," Rael went on with a ferocious frown, "I've been wondering whether that man was Gerald or me."

So! It was out. Vera stiffened, her green eyes glowed resentfully. Something about those Satanic eyebrows and

the expression beneath them fascinated her: she was looking into the face of a triumphant devil.

"Well, today I put it to the test," her husband continued. "I gave him his chance and he didn't have the strength, or the courage, to take it. . . . Hang onto yourself for I've got something pretty shocking to tell you."

"Rael!" The wife leaned forward, the blood drained from her cheeks. "What has happened?"

Outside Batjo Sembilan was heard approaching, evidently with fresh tea, and Rael waited until the boy had entered before he spoke. Then in a more ordinary tone he answered: "I've got news that I don't know how to break. That's why I'm late. It's awfully bad news, Vera, and it's about Gerald."

The woman gasped and raised a hand to her throat. Batjo shot one swift, inquiring glance at his employer, then he carefully placed the silver tea pot on the tray, stepped aside and waited, as always.

"Gerald had an accident this afternoon." This information was directed not only at her, Vera realized, but also at the servant, and dimly she began to understand the nature of her betrayal, also why Rael had purposely waited until the house boy entered the room.

"Not—serious?" she managed to inquire.

"Very serious! And about as damnable as it could be."

The wife cried out hoarsely, "This is some hideous—joke. You're trying to torture me."

"No. Only to prepare you. Gerald is—dead."

Batjo did not stir nor lift his downcast eyes. Vera, too,

was dumb, the breath had stopped in her lungs, her heart had ceased beating, the room began slowly, dizzily to revolve. She was deathly sick. Dreadful questions rose to her lips, prompted by Rael's earlier words, but she could not frame them. . . . The stronger, more ruthless man. . . . He had put it to the test. . . . Gerald dead! The appalling suddenness of this catastrophe paralyzed her. What had happened? A duel?

"Shortly before tiffin I telephoned and asked him if he'd care to go towing with me this afternoon." Rael's voice seemed to come from a great distance but his face was near and it was lit by some internal fire: to the wife it appeared to glow like a hot, copper devil-mask. "We ran down to the port and put out to sea—about five miles I'd say. Anyhow we were completely beyond reach of help. First I went overboard. I stayed in a long while—much longer than usual." There was a significant pause and Vera understood as plainly as if her husband had said, in so many words, that he had purposely allowed his naked body to be dragged at the end of that rope to test the courage and the ruthlessness of his enemy. Was it courage, rancor, malevolence, or what? Plainly, in view of that discussion the night before, he had expected Gerald to cast him off, and the latter's failure to do so he had put down as weakness. What a way to torture the man he had befriended! Five miles out. Beyond reach of help. . . . He had given Gerald every "chance" as he put it. . . . Vera wondered if her lover had grasped the significance of Rael's daring, his defiance. No doubt,

but what guilty paramour could have damned his soul by accepting such a challenge?

Rael was speaking again, "Finally when I was satisfied, that is, when I'd had enough, I climbed aboard and—he took his turn. I ran the launch pretty fast, on account of the sharks and the crocodiles. Somehow the rope worked loose, the knot must have slipped or something, anyhow—" Rael finished the sentence with a gesture. "Terrible thing, so far from help! It's a noisy engine and if he called I didn't hear him. Of course I swung about as soon as I discovered what had happened, but it was no use. The sharks are thicker than usual this season and——"

A shriek of horror burst from Vera's throat. She stifled it with her hand, then rose and went blindly out of the room, groping her way.

Rael watched her go; after a moment he shrugged his shoulders. "It was a sad occurrence, Batjo."

"Very sad, tuan," the boy agreed.

"The memsahib and I will miss our friend. Things will not be the same here."

"Indeed no. Very different, tuan."

"And yet why grieve? Death is inevitable."

"Inevitable!" Batjo nodded. "Shall I pour some tea, or would the tuan prefer whiskey?"

"Tea, please, with a slice of lemon."

TOMMY MARSHALL



NO GOOD

IV

No Good

TOMMY MARSHALL felt pretty thoroughly depressed as he stood at the end of the jetty and surveyed the town before him. He had often heard of Thursday Island—this insignificant spot on the map off the North East Coast of Australia—but he had never expected to see it. Now he ran a somber eye over the place and muttered, "What a hell of a dump!" It was the hundredth time he had voiced those words, or something like them.

I venture to say that you would heartily agree with Marshall's summing up of that place if you ever saw it. It isn't a bit like the other islands in those parts. It is about the frowziest hell-hole I have ever run across.

Thursday Island has been called "the land of sin, sand and sorrow" and in Marshall's opinion the description was apt but inadequate. It was—just a hell of a dump. The island itself was inhospitable, it was baked and barren and it glared at visitors. Its ramshackle buildings, rain-washed and sun-scalded, were huddled together—stores, saloons, dwellings and tawdry native brothels—as if loneliness had drawn them to each other and they were now too discouraged to care what company they

kept. Their melancholy appearance created an atmosphere of dejected apathy which was slowly having its effect upon Tommy Marshall, ordinarily a blithe young person. The population fitted the place admirably, too. It consisted of Malays, Chinese, South Sea Islanders, Japanese and a handful of Europeans. The latter, an ill assorted lot, were made up of owners of pearl fishing boats, traders and beach combers. One or two of the last named had been gentlemen at some time or other but the rest were the usual footless sort. Casuals who had been washed up by the sea. Most of them had outlived their welcome elsewhere.

Removing his sun hat Tommy mopped his forehead. It was early afternoon, the sweatiest part of the day, and few people were in sight. From a brazen sky the sun beat down with vindictive ferocity: the sea was a sheet of hot oil upon the surface of which a few small craft rested motionless. They appeared to suffer. Tommy laid his hand on a pile of pungent-smelling sandalwood unloaded that morning from New Guinea. With a sharp "ouch" he drew it away—the logs were blisteringly hot.

Marshall had not come to Thursday Island with any set purpose in mind, he had trickled in. He had strolled down to the jetty today on the off chance that he might discover some means of trickling out again. But no new boats were in port.

A year previously, having worked his way through college and finding the whole wide world awaiting him,

Tommy Marshall had thrown his respectable parents into a panic by announcing his determination to see just how wide that world really was. He proposed to kick about a bit before entombing himself for life in a nine-to-five job, so he said. Despite a deal of earnest advice to the contrary he had set out with a suitcase and fifty dollars, destination unknown.

He had visited England first. He arrived there with his capital still intact, having worked his way over on a cattle boat. After seeing the sights of London he fell in with an airplane pilot who gave him a free lift to Paris and there he stumbled into a berth as secretary to a fellow American whom he met in a cocktail bar.

Two months later, when his employer sailed for home, Tommy took a leisurely walking tour through Germany and Italy. He was getting the breaks. Things were fine and dandy. Naples gave him a hunger for the East and he signed on with a short-handed English tramp bound for Bombay.

He liked Bombay, did Tommy, and he tried for a job with every big business house in the city. None of them, however, would risk engaging a man who had just happened along. Such fellows are objects of suspicion in the East and there is the white man's prestige to consider. "Awf'ly sorry, old man, but you understand how it is out here." Not being British, Tommy didn't understand so very clearly.

He did manage to get a bit of work as checking clerk in a go-down and made the most of it.

A similar attitude of mind prevailed in Penang and Singapore: strangers were suspected. Finally, with no very definite idea where he was going he got passage on a coal boat to Thursday Island.

He had been here a week now and it was plenty. He had made up his mind to stow away if necessary.

The heat struck through the soles of his shoes as he started back down the jetty. He was thirsty. He decided to indulge himself in the extravagance of a mug of cold beer at Dulcie's.

Dulcie hailed from Sydney: she had yellow hair and red cheeks and she was barmaid at one of the saloons. She was the only nice thing to look at on the whole island and Tommy liked her: in fact, he had spent most of his idle time in her place yarning with her while she polished glasses behind her marble bar. They got along well together: Dulcie was a good scout.

Ordinarily the saloon was deserted at this time of day but Tommy heard voices as he approached and he entered to find the place occupied by a half dozen ruffians, some of whom he had learned to recognize. The leader of the group was a burly fellow known locally as Bill the Hangman, a sobriquet in which he took pride by reason of the fact that he had once acted in that capacity at an Australian prison. Bill owned a couple of rusty pearling luggers, he was a free spender and the beach combers fawned on him. His present companions were drinking at his expense; they sat about on the dilapidated horse hair chairs and laughed uproariously at his jokes.

Tommy was sorry he had come in for it was evident that the Hangman had been chaffing Dulcie pretty roughly. Her face was redder than usual, there was a resentful gleam in her eyes. Marshall sidled unobtrusively up to the bar and waited for her to take his order. When she set his beer before him he smiled at her, then sipped it slowly and listened. He decided he'd get out and return later.

"Now, Dulcie, you do like I tell you," the Hangman persisted loudly. "You come out here and walk on your hands like a nice girl."

There was applause from the unshaven audience: Dulcie turned her back to the room and went on with her work.

"Hop to it, kid. Don't keep me waiting," Bill ordered.

"Don't be silly," the girl snapped at him.

"You better do it before I make you."

"Make me?" Dulcie turned her head slowly and eyed the man. "You get out and take your body lice with you."

There was a laugh at this, the Hangman drained his mug, wiped his lips with the back of his hand and ordered another round. Dulcie shrugged, she drew more beer.

A moment later, when she had served the drinks Bill seized her. "Now then, on your hands, Blondy, or I'll tip you up," said he.

"Let me go!" Dulcie cried harshly. She wrenched at her captor, her eyes dilated like those of a cat. The

onlookers whooped and stamped. Thus encouraged the Hangman bent to scoop her up in his arms, whereupon Tommy Marshall spoke,

"Leave her alone!"

With no more than a glance at the intruder Bill turned his attention again to the struggling girl, whereupon Marshall did something chivalrous but rash. He stepped forward, doubled his fist and plastered the bully with all the strength of his hundred and twenty pound body.

Abruptly the noise ceased. The Hangman blinked, slowly he released Dulcie and turned to survey the diminutive American who had assaulted him. The blow had not injured him in the least but plainly his dignity was outraged. He scowled: Tommy felt rather sick.

"You bloody little tadpole!" rumbled the Hangman after a withering glare. "Nobody can do that to me." He hitched his pants' band higher, he flexed his hairy arms and advanced with a gorilla-like roll. There was murder in his face.

Tommy backed away. He could have ducked and run but he had stood up to more than one beating. He was no rabbit. Evidently the bruiser scorned hitting him, he proposed to squeeze him in his hands like a rat: strangle him until his eyes popped out, deliberately break his bones. The boy set himself to deliver at least one more blow before those enormous ape hands seized him when out of the corner of his eye he saw a flash of pink. There came a thud, a crash of shattering glass, the Hangman staggered, a queer, dazed expression leaped into his

countenance and he went to the floor without uttering a sound.

Dulcie stood over him with the long neck of a broken bottle in her hand. It was jagged, she brandished it like a dagger and spoke to the beach combers.

"Take that carcass out of here, you mongrels. And if you raise a hand to this boy I'll cut your hearts out. Quick now! Get him away!"

They eyed her weapon, then picked up their leader. The party decanted itself into the blazing street.

"You certainly begged for a good licking, young feller." Dulcie took a broom to the broken glass. Tommy fanned himself and filled his lungs. "Next time you sock a guy twice your size, take a crowbar."

"The big hoodlum!" Tommy scowled in the direction of the street.

"You're a game little rooster, and—you're a gentleman." Dulcie leaned her broom against the bar: she took Marshall's face between her hands and kissed him on the mouth. "Thanks a lot. Does that make things okay?"

"Sure does!" the latter said with a grin. "But Dulcie—I hope you didn't get in wrong on my account, busting a bottle on that rowdy? Won't he try to——?"

"Rats! That's how his bunch fights. They're tough—and so am I. I was raised around drunks."

"If he comes back and starts something——"

"No chance. I know him and he ain't such a bad sort. He won't hold it against me and he'll probably

think all the better of you for slamming him. I bet you're the first half-pint he ever saw that he couldn't swallow."

"I'm not looking for trouble, but I couldn't let him rough you."

"Sit down," said the girl. "I want to talk to you." When she had finished with her sweeping she took her place beside him on a sofa. "I've been studying you these last few days. Honest to God, Tommy, are you just a common bum?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why are you here? Maybe you're a crazy American millionaire out to pull people's legs."

"I wish I were. No, I'm just what I said I am."

"No money?"

"Not a cent."

There was a pause. "Need a loan?"

"No, thanks. I'll get by. I'm seeing a bit of the world before I settle down to a lifetime of slavery."

"Slavery?"

"Sure! My dad wants to chain me to a desk in some bank or bond house. I hate to think about it."

"Would you like to make a stake?"

"Stop your kidding."

Dulcie smiled. "Me, too. I'm fed up on this game. . . . Could you rustle a couple of hundred pounds?"

"Why?"

"Oh, I could put you in the way to pull off a small fortune, that's all. No risks, either. I've got a couple

of hundred of my own saved up. We could make a killing."

"Two hundred pounds! That's a thousand dollars in my money. Tell me about it."

"What's the use, if you're broke? It would just make you sore and you might tip it off. It's the first real chance I ever had and I hate to miss it."

A customer entered the bar-room and Dulcie rose to wait on him. Tommy smoked a cigarette and pondered. When at length the girl returned to his side he said:

"There's a fellow back home who might stake me—I don't know. We were buddies at college and I've been saving him for a last touch, in case my luck runs out."

"Oh, Tommy!"

"But it would have to be a rock bound certainty before I'd ask him. A perfect cinch, understand? I'd feel rotten if it went wrong and I couldn't pay him back."

"Don't worry about that. My money wasn't given to me, either. Will you promise not to open your trap if you can't come in?"

"My sacred word of honor!"

Dulcie studied the young man gravely for a moment, then she hitched herself closer and began speaking in a low voice. "It's a go! Here's the dope. About three years ago a pearling schooner, the *Valkyrie*, was lost in a dirty rain and wind squall. Caught with too much canvas on, so people think: anyhow she disappeared with all hands. She belonged to a fellow named George Parker who owned a fleet of fifteen luggers. The *Valkyrie* was

his parent ship, see, and he lived aboard her. Things had broken well for him that season and he had no end of big pearls—all of twenty thousand pounds' worth—and they went down with him."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. George showed 'em to me only a week before the storm. That part is well known: he showed 'em to everybody. You can ask about it. . . . Well, there's a Jap diver here, name of Okura. Cunning little devil and crooked as hell. I know him well. He thinks he's in love with me. That's how I learned what I'm going to tell you." The speaker cast a glance over her shoulder and her voice sank lower. "He knows where the schooner lies. . . . He ran across her while he was working on the bottom about a month ago. He thought he recognized her, even with all the weeds she had collected, and sure enough he found her name on the bow.

"He's a quick thinker is Okura. He signalled his tender to pull him up and luckily he was able to get his exact bearings from a couple of islands not far off. Naturally he didn't dare put down a buoy for fear somebody might happen along and investigate.

"Well, he came in to see me as soon as he got back. He was foaming, and no wonder. You see if he reports the *Valkyrie* she'll belong to Bob Hoffman who owns the boat Okura was working on. That's the law. His only chance is to buy a boat of his own and find the wreck for himself. But he hasn't got a cent and nobody will trust him. He wants me to put up the coin and go fifty-fifty

on the spoils. I'd do it in a minute but the worst sort of an old tub, diving gear and all, would cost four hundred quid, and—there you are. I can pay my half if you can scare up the balance. We'll split my share."

"Gosh! It sounds good." Tommy's eyes were sparkling, his blood tingled. "We'd be risking a thousand dollars apiece and divide something like fifty thousand. . . . Oh boy! What I could do with my twenty five!"

"Sure! And I could quit beer-jerking. Lord! It's a rotten business. I'd have chucked it years ago only I've got responsibilities and—it's better than some other things. This is the only chance I'll ever have, Tommy. I've been half crazy ever since Okura told me, and the same with him. He's drinking his head off over in the Jap quarter. We talk about it every day or two. He's telling the truth—I'll bank my life on that—and if I can't make the raise he'll go to somebody else. I'm scared stiff. What if he gets drunk enough to blab? Or—suppose he tries to sell his information? Bung off and cable your pal right now, Tommy."

"Darned if I don't believe I'll take a chance."

Following some further discussion Marshall left for the cable office and on the second morning thereafter he was in possession of two hundred pounds. That afternoon he, Dulcie and Okura met in the barroom and discussed the enterprise. The Japanese was elated, he knew exactly where a boat could be purchased and it could be registered in Tommy's name. That would excite neither

comment nor curiosity. Dulcie insisted that her name should not be mentioned.

When the lugger had been bought, there was another meeting. Then it was that something occurred which occasioned Tommy his first misgivings. He had assumed that he would go along with Okura to salvage the pearls and he was surprised when this did not meet with the approval of his associates. Dulcie shook her head at the suggestion, the diver bared his teeth in a smile that was intended to be friendly, and agreed.

"It would be better for you to stay here. You would not be comp'table on that boat, Mister Maasal." Okura had a way of lingering on his sibilants. "Somebody might suspect——"

"Never mind that. We're in this thing together——"

"Okura is right," Dulcie interrupted. "If he needed watching I wouldn't have gone into it. He's a square shooter. When he gets the safe aboard he's going to bring it straight here. Right?" She turned to the Japanese and he nodded vigorously.

"That is our understanding. We will open it here."

"You'd only be in the way, Tommy. You'd be sure to tip off to the crew and—they mustn't dream what's going on. Okura knows how to handle them."

"I am an honest man. I take the risks and—I know best," the latter asserted.

"Sure. And I've got as much money in this as you have," said Dulcie. "Two to one, Tommy. You're out-voted."

Marshall did not like this arrangement in the least and he began to regret his impulsiveness but there was nothing to be done about it now. The lugger had been bought and it was too late to back out. He could not bring himself to believe that Dulcie would deliberately double cross him in favor of the Jap and yet—well, the thing looked fishy. He felt decidedly unhappy.

Later, when he and the girl were alone he fired a salvo of anxious questions at her.

"I wouldn't let you put out to sea with that rotter," she declared. "Accidents happen too easy."

"Hell's bells! If he's that sort, there's all the more reason—. What's to prevent him from sailing away with the safe and everything?"

"It's your boat: he wouldn't dare. We owe him a chance to play fair."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"Well, it's his discovery, isn't it?"

"I know. But— Something tells me we're in for a trimming, Dulcie."

"Oh, dry up!" the girl cried impatiently. "I wasn't born yesterday and I know what I'm doing. D'you think I'm going to let a greasy little rat get the best of me?"

Marshall threw up his hands in a gesture of surrender.

He slept badly that night. What a fool he had been. A credulous, greedy idiot. Something for nothing! People didn't get rich that way. Where would he earn a thousand dollars to repay that loan? This meant that it would be years before he could go home.

During the next several days he divided his time between Dulcie's bar and the jetty: his eyes grew tired staring at the horizon for a sight of his lugger, and every sail that hove in sight filled him with excitement. His anticipations were invariably succeeded by apprehensions. Dulcie, too, was on pins and needles but she did not seem to share his doubts of the Japanese. She seemed to be convinced that he would return, and eventually her faith was rewarded.

One night when the last customer had gone home and she was preparing to shut up shop the door opened: Okura and his tender walked into the saloon.

Tommy flung aside the magazine he had been reading and sprang to his feet. Swiftly Dulcie bolted the street door.

"Well!" she exclaimed in an oddly repressed tone. "When did you get in?"

"An hour or two ago. We have been waiting outside." Okura and the tender perched themselves uncomfortably on the edge of two chairs.

"Did you get the safe?" Tommy inquired in a voice that shook.

The diver nodded. He dropped his eyes, he picked at his strong thumbnails. Something in his demeanor caused the American's heart to sink. "Yes, Mister Maasal, the safe is aboard, but—there is nothing in it. Nothing except some ship's papers and a little money."

"No pearls?" Dulcie inquired.

The Japanese shook his head. "I don't onerstand——"

"You thieving hound!" Tommy exploded. "You promised not to open——"

"Shut up!" Dulcie commanded. She studied the crest-fallen diver through narrowed eyelids. "So you busted into it, did you?"

"I am sorry," Okura apologized abjectly, "but I could not wait. All my life I dive pearls. I had to look. I would not have taken a single one. I only wished to make sure——"

"So, it was a wild goose chase——"

"Dulcie! Do you believe that yarn?"

"I swear——" Okura began.

"Sure! I believe it! Okura's telling the truth."

Marshall uttered a scornful sound whereupon the girl cried sharply: "Be a sport! I'm as much loser as you are and if I can stand it so can you. . . . Calm down. A little drink won't hurt any of us. No need of parting bad friends."

"Leave me out," Marshall said sourly. "I don't drink with crooks."

"Mister Maasal! I am an honest man. I worked very hard. I am sad." The diver sighed, he took one of the glasses which Dulcie brought for him and his companion, while Tommy paced the room in a fury which he had hard work to restrain. Okura drank and talked quietly with Dulcie. It was evident now that Parker, the *Valkyrie's* owner, had sent the pearls down to Sydney by some friend. Or perhaps he had removed them from the safe

when the squall struck and they had been lost with him. So on and so forth.

To Tommy Marshall it seemed that Dulcie was a credulous fool to listen to this palaver. The Jap was an out-and-out robber. . . . Or maybe the whole thing was a swindle devised especially for him. It certainly began to look like something of the sort. He was too furious to notice that the eyes of the two drinkers were becoming dull, or that Okura's tongue was thickening.

Not until the latter lurched forward and slid limply out of his chair did he divine what had been going on under his very eyes. He saw then that the tender, too, was all but unconscious. He strode forward and seized the fellow's arm.

"What the devil did you put in that gin?" he inquired of the barmaid.

Dulcie's manner had changed, she spoke with force and assurance. "Never mind. I know how to handle these birds. You run down to the beach, Tommy, and find the dinghy they came ashore in. Row out to our boat and wake old Abbas, the Malay. Bring him and another man back with you, and hurry. We're in luck, baby——"

"I don't under——"

"Don't stand there gabbing. Get a move on. There's a Dutch boat pulling out at sparrow squeak in the morning and when these beauties wake up they'll be on their way to Soerabaja."

"I'm in bad enough now," the American protested.

"Why shanghai these crooks and risk a stretch in the pen?"

"Stretch hell! I knew Okura would open that safe. I wanted him to open it. That's why I wouldn't let you go along. I know what I'm doing every minute." She came close to Marshall and took him by the lapels of his coat. Her eyes were shining, her lips were parted. "I wouldn't get you in wrong, Tommy." She drew him to her and kissed him, then shoved him towards the door. "Leg it, quick. I'll tell you everything later."

In a daze young Marshall sped out into the night.

He was back with Abbas and another man inside of half an hour: Dulcie gave them her instructions and some money with which to square the Malay boys on the steamer. Old Abbas seemed to understand her perfectly, his task appeared to cause him no surprise.

"Where do we go from here?" Tommy inquired breathlessly when the two Japs had been carried away.

"Aboard the lugger, old kid, and then back to the *Valkyrie*. I told Mrs. Gill, while you were gone, that she'll have to look after her own bar for a few days. Everything is all set. Come along."

A few minutes later as they passed down the deserted street the girl explained, "I was pretty certain those pearls wouldn't be in the safe. And I felt sure Okura would double cross us but—Lord, you have to give a feller a break, no matter how crooked he is. Now he's declared himself out and—the stuff is all ours, if we can find it."

"'If we can find it.' Those pearls won't be floating around on the surface——"

"Give me credit for brains, Tommy. I'm as smart as they make 'em, if I do say it. Abbas used to be a diver; that's why I got him aboard. And he owes me a good turn. I staked him once when he was laid up with a squeeze from diving in deep water. He's the soul of honor——"

"But—d'you think he can find the wreck?"

"D'you think I didn't plan for all that? I told him to mark the place carefully. If Okura could find it, he can."

"Gosh! You're a peach," Tommy exclaimed. "I—I was afraid——"

In the darkness Dulcie felt for his hand and pressed it.

A half hour later the dinghy appeared and she hailed it softly from the jetty.

"Two men fix up all proper, Missie," Abbas reported. He held the boat while Tommy clambered down into it and lifted his arms for his companion.

"Smooth work, old timer," Dulcie told the Malay approvingly. "Pull away."

Abbas roused the crew of the lugger when his party was aboard, soon there was the harsh rattle of the anchor chain and the click of the windlass. Rusty blocks creaked as the halyards were hauled upon, a light breeze propelled the craft out into a vast and inky blackness.

The next afternoon Abbas put on an enormously thick suit of diving underwear, rubber dress, corslet and leaden-

soled boots. Mainsail and foresail were lowered, the crew appointed to act as tender tested the depth of the water, screwed down Abbas' helmet and lowered him over the side.

"He's too old for this game and I hate to see him go down," said Dulcie, "but there was nobody else I could trust."

Tommy stared anxiously out over the empty waters towards two islands several miles away: he shook his head. "I don't see how he'll ever find the hulk. This is worse than looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Lord, but you're cheerful," the girl told him.

With only a jib spread to the vagrant breeze, the lugger barely moved: the tender leaned on the tiller and maneuvered the craft this way and that according to the signals sent up over the life line. Hours passed. Dulcie and Tommy looked on, tense and silent.

Twilight was not far off when the tender suddenly straightened and shouted, "Let go anchor!" To Dulcie he announced excitedly, "Abbas catch that boat, Missie." He began to haul the diver up.

Abbas emerged from the water like some grotesque, shiny monster: his face was creased with smiles when his helmet was removed.

Dulcie patted his damp head and exclaimed: "Good man!"

"We got luck find him so quick, Missie. Okura take two days."

"I told Tommy you savvy this business!" Dulcie

smiled triumphantly at her companion. "Gee! I wish I could put on that suit and go down for you. I'm fairly dying, I am."

As soon as it was light enough on the following morning Abbas went over the side again. Inasmuch as the lugger was short-handed, Dulcie directed Tommy to take his turn at the air pump with the coolies while she did the cooking for the crew. The girl had a level head, she was all business.

At regular intervals the old diver came up for a rest. Dulcie gave him coffee and he apologized: "Him work little bit slow. Me very old man: not very fast go like young feller." He explained as best he could that the sand was heavy, the sea weeds were thick and treacherous. Both had to be cleared away. The light was dim and Abbas had to feel his way: there was the ever present danger of fouling his air line in the wreck and it was necessary to keep a sharp lookout for devil-fish, too. They lurked about sunken ships.

Sweat streamed from the old Malay's face, his horny hands were cut and bleeding, but he smiled and nodded and when he had regained his strength he cheerfully returned to the depths.

For three days this continued and the strain began to tell on Abbas. He could barely speak now when they hauled him on deck for a breather. His eyes looked like those of a man perishing for sleep. Tommy's back was stiff, his muscles were sore from endless hours on

the pump handle: his hands felt like bunches of fat, aching sausages.

Excitement had given way to fatigue and monotony by this time—there was no end to the pumping and the heat was terrible. The lugger reeked of a hundred unpleasant odors for it was a smelly, rat-infested craft, and Tommy told himself that this was indeed a wild goose chase—the very wildest his lively imagination had ever invented. How mad he had been to risk borrowed money on an enterprise like this.

He was busied in the stifling hold when he heard Abbas' lead-soled boots thumping against the side as he was hoisted aboard. An instant and Dulcie called to him, "Tommy! Tommy! Quick!"

By the time he had clambered out on deck the diver was sitting slumped against the main mast. His arms hung limp, Dulcie was on her knees at his side and supporting his head.

"Bring some brandy," she cried. "Hurry!"

Marshall sped away.

By the time a stiff shot of liquor had been poured down his throat Abbas opened his eyes, he rolled his head.

"Feel better?" the girl asked.

He nodded and tried to smile.

Tommy felt his heart sink. This was the end. Poor Dulcie! It was tougher on her than on him.

"Get his dress off and put him in his bunk," she said to the tender. Then she rose and beckoned to Tommy

with her head. Dejectedly he followed her until he noticed of a sudden that she carried something concealed by her skirt.

"What have you got there?" he inquired.

"The pearls—I think. Fetch a hammer and a chisel—something to break open this box."

Marshall snatched a large screw driver, he dove into the cabin at Dulcie's heels and began to pry and to wrench at a rusty tin box which she placed on the table. It was stouter than it appeared, his hand slipped and the jagged metal tore off part of a fingernail but he felt no pain.

The lock broke finally with a sharp crack; he pried the lid back.

Dulcie shouldered him aside and pulled out the upper compartment disclosing beneath it an array of round wooden boxes such as chemists use for pills. A cry of triumph burst from her lips: hastily she wrenched the top from one. Inside was a nest of glowing gems. Box after box was opened and each contained lustrous treasure. The pearls had all been graded as to shape and size, their sheer beauty held the fortune-hunters spell-bound.

Dulcie was the first to give way. She began to laugh and to cry: she flung her arms around Tommy's neck and kissed him. Then she ran out on deck to hug old Abbas.

When the young man followed it was to find the crew laughing and shouting while they made sail. "I told

them all there's something handsome coming to them," Dulcie announced. "That's okay with you, isn't it?"

"Rather! And we must reward Abbas, too."

"Isn't he an old peach? Let's make him a present of the lugger. He can employ a diver and live on easy street."

"You bet! Gee, Dulcie! I don't see yet how you doped this thing out, and how Okura missed those pearls——"

"I knew from the jump that they weren't in the safe and I knew just where George Parker kept them. In a secret drawer under his bunk. . . . He was smart. He was suspicious, too. Oh, Tommy! We're rich! Rich! . . . I—" The girl's voice broke, she blinked her big blue eyes. "I think it's about time I hid out and had a good cry."

It was three days later. Tommy Marshall had come to Mrs. Gill's to say good-bye to Dulcie for his ship was leaving in an hour. She had engaged passage for Sydney the day following.

The girl was clad in her nicest dress when she entered the little parlor. Tommy had never seen her look so pretty, or so pale. She came forward and laid her hands in his. "Good luck, old-timer. You're not stowing away, after all."

He smiled back at her and shook his head. "I've seen enough of the world to do me. I'm going home."

"Me, too. I'm going to buy a little house with green blinds and a garden and a nice clean lawn. I know the very place."

He stared queerly at her for a moment, then he began, "I've been doing some heavy thinking, Dulcie. I've never been around girls very much but—I'm never going to forget those days with you on the lugger. They were almost like a—honeymoon."

Dulcie's vivid color faded even more perceptibly, she withdrew her hands from his.

"Ain't you the romantic little man? If Mrs. Gill heard you my reputation would be ruined."

"Listen! You've had your share of—troubles. Let me see that you don't have any more. You're a grand girl. How'd it be if we got married?"

Dulcie drew a sharp breath. "I can think of worse things but—" She shook her shining head.

With a sudden rush of feeling Marshall exclaimed: "I love you, Dulcie: I'm not going to sail on that boat for Singapore."

"Oh, yes you are," she asserted positively. "You're going to say good-bye to me right now and beat it."

"No!"

Dulcie turned her back and gazed out of the window: after a moment she exclaimed: "Hell! What's the use! I've got to let you have it between the eyes." She faced him again and now there was no color whatever in her cheeks. "I told you I'd lived tough, Tommy. I couldn't marry any gentleman because—I'm no good. How d'you suppose I knew where George Parker hid his pearls? Use your head, pal. I spent a lot of time on his boat. . . . And that ain't all. I've got a kid in Sydney. She's the

'responsibility' I told you about. . . . I was never married."

It was Marshall's turn to face the window. The ocean looked very clean and blue: it reminded him somehow of the sea off the coast of Maine. Everything back home was clean—

"Better get going, Tommy. You can write to me some time." Dulcie put her arms around his neck and kissed him; then she shoved him out the door.

When Mrs. Gill came into the parlor some time later she found her former barmaid stretched upon the sofa, weeping silently.

TONY BERESFORD AND THE SCHEUTEMAS



AT THE KAYU BESI TREE

At the Kayu Besi Tree

MY DEAR FRIEND ANTHONY:

Will you please come to see me at your very soon convenience? I would like to talk with you on a matter of very importance.

Your sincere friend,

HENDRICK SCHEUTEMA.

YOUNG Tony Beresford read this note, written in a thin cramped hand and couched in the Dutchman's far from impeccable English, and wondered what the old man could want of him. Turning to the native messenger who had brought it to the plantation, he said: "Where did you leave your boat?"

"It is yonder on the beach, tuan," the boy answered, pointing Malay fashion with his chin.

"Good. Wait for me there and I'll go back with you after tiffin."

"*Baik, tuan!*" The lean boatman rose from his squatting position, salaamed, and went off through the rubber trees.

Before I go any further let me tell you something about this man, Scheutema. He was a queer old bird, suspi-

cious as they make them. He was difficult to get along with, but if you did happen to hit it off with him there wasn't anything he wouldn't do for you. I first met him in the Amboyna Hospital where I'd gone to see Tony Beresford who was down pretty badly with dengue. The place was crowded and Scheutema and Tony had been put in the same room. When they were convalescent Tony used to read to him and do all sorts of little things for him. They became very close friends. The old fellow thought there was nobody in the world quite like Tony. Now I'll get back to the story.

Within half an hour Tony was on his way from Amboyna to Ceram. The narrow stretch of sea that separated the two islands was the color of a robin's egg, and the afternoon sun beat down with a relentless ferocity that would have been unbearable except for the steady beam wind which tempered its scorching rays and sent the light *prahu* with its curious tripod mast and picturesque rust-colored sail scuttling through the water like a hungry fish.

Sitting there, protected by a cork sun helmet, his white tunic coat open at the neck, Tony tried again and again to think what the matter of "very importance" about which Hendrick Scheutema wanted to see him might be. He was fond of the old man and he hoped nothing serious had happened. Perhaps that rotten son of Hendrick's had been playing up and getting into more trouble.

A riotous tropical sunset was subsiding into demi-tints

edged with pale shades of mauve and yellow and blue a tranquil dusk settled on the world and the *prahu* ran aground off Ceram. The boatman stepped into the shallow, crystal-clear water and carried Tony on his back to the beach of coral sand as white as table salt beyond which the rich, undulating land, dense with vivid green trees and lush shrubbery resembled some fanciful painting. Hendrick Scheutema's big bungalow stood back a couple of hundred yards from the water, and as Tony strolled up to it he sniffed gratefully at the odors of warm earth, spices and waxen petalled flowers—always more pleasantly pungent at twilight. It was the time of day he liked best.

"Ah, my dear boy!" the welcoming voice of Hendrick Scheutema sounded from the veranda.

"Hullo, sir," Tony responded. He ran up the steps and shook the fat old man's hand.

"It is indeed very nice of you to come so soon," Hendrick said, patting him on the shoulder. "I am very obliged. Please sit down."

Tony had not seen Hendrick for nearly two months and he was a little shocked to see how ill the planter looked and to note how his hands trembled when he mixed the gin and bitters.

Having passed one of the *pahits* to his guest Hendrick held up his glass and smiled.

"Prosit," he said.

"Prosit," Tony echoed, and swallowed the liquor with relish.

It was not until Hendrick had refilled their glasses and had glanced cautiously about him that he settled down to tell Tony why he had sent for him.

"Anthony, my friend," he began, "I have a suggestion to make to you—something that should be for your very good." Scheutema always made excessive use of the word "very."

"That's interesting, sir. What is it?"

"I wish to sell to you my plantation."

"Sell it to *me!*" echoed the young man in amazement. "You know I couldn't buy a hen coop, let alone——"

"Wait! Wait!" Hendrick held up a plump, admonitory hand. "It is no matter that you lack money. I do not ask for a *kipping* now. You will pay me for it out of the profits you make and six per cent interest each year on the amount you owe until you have cleared the debt. You will have your very own place. No longer will you have to be the assistant manager of Mr. van Hoesen's plantation. And three hundred thousand guilders is all I ask you for it. Very dirt-cheap! The profit last year was over fifty thousand, and with a young, very energetic man like you in charge it should be much more. In six or seven years the place will be yours—clear of everything."

The proposition all but took Tony's breath. For several seconds he stared at Hendrick in bewildered silence.

"What is the matter with you, Anthony?" Scheutema asked at last. "You do not want my plantation?"

"I'd give my eyes to have it," the boy declared in a voice flat and throaty with emotion.

"Then is it that you think I ask too much for it?"

"Not at all, sir. It's a gift at the figure. What I can't make out is why you offer it to me on such ridiculously easy terms."

"Listen, my friend," said Hendrick, pulling his wicker chair closer to the table. "I will tell you somethings. I am fifty-eight and that is old for one who has spent most of his life in the Islands. And I am sick. There is not for me many more years and those years I want to spend back in my Holland. It is like that with people when they come near the end. For months I have wanted to sell my plantation but I know of no one who could pay me cash and I could not go away with a peaceful mind if any of these swindlers here owed me for it. I know them. Always they have tried to cheat me. You, Anthony, have been my good friend since we met four years ago and I am certain that you are very honest. You will pay me. And I must be paid because my plantation and a few thousands in the bank—not very much—is all what I have in the world. How then shall I live if I let them swindle me?"

"Of course you must be careful," Anthony agreed. "I feel a bit funky about owing you all that money, but if you're satisfied to let me have the place why—I'll agree to pay off the debt just as fast as I can. It will depend on how the profits come in."

"I am very happy for you to have it," said Hendrick,

extending his hand. "It is then a bargain. Tomorrow we go to the Controleur at Amboyna to sign the papers."

When Hendrick had filled the *pahit* glasses again he leaned across the table towards Anthony.

"My friend," he said, "there is another thing to speak of. It is about my son, and I must say it to you before he comes back—he is out shooting in the jungle. You know—everybody knows—that Louis is bad. Just as bad as a man can be. The troubles I have had with that boy! Tse! Tse! Many times he has stolen from me and from other people. And twice he has forged my name on a check. For cheating at cards he has been thrown out of the club at Amboyna. I have burned from shame ever since that time. And the troubles he has made for me by playing with the wives of the coolies! *Chelaka!*"

The old man flapped his hands to and fro like fishes' tails and turned his eyes distressfully heavenwards.

"Perhaps it is my punishment," he continued, "for marrying a Malay woman. In no other way can I account for it that she gives me a child like Louis. Poor Hodoh—there was no badness in her. Always she was sweet and beautiful till the cholera took her from me. And after she died I sent Louis to Holland to be educated—and then for two years in England. That was a very great mistake. He came back still with all his Malay vices and a very lot more he had learned abroad. And with his education he was more cunning and clever in his badness. Ach! I would sell to him the plantation on such easy terms as I sell it to you, or make him my

partner, but to do so would be very impossible. He would swindle me. And he will not work. Very quickly the plantation would be no good and I would be a beggar in Holland."

"I know Louis' history pretty well," said Tony. "It's a bit murky and I see how risky it would be to leave the place in his hands. I'm sorry he has been such a disappointment to you."

"Ah, yes! I have had many disappointments, many trials. I have not told you all of them." Hendrick lowered his voice still more and sat forward in his chair. "Another thing I must speak about for your own protection: it is that I am being poisoned."

"Good Lord!" Tony exclaimed. "You're not serious."

"I am, my friend."

"That's almost too thick. Who in the world would do a thing like that?"

The Dutchman gesticulated, he lifted his shoulders but he did not answer the question. "For a long time the malaria has been in my bones and the doctors have said I must go away but lately I have had often too very strange pains in my belly after eating." He nodded several times and laid a pudgy hand upon his bulging mid-section. "A sleep comes over me and I am not well. At first I said to myself 'that is suspicious: you are an old man, Scheutema. Perhaps you over-eat.'"

"Precisely what I had in mind."

The planter's round head rocked in denial. "No. All my life I have made the habit to over-eat and nothing

happens. I put two and two together. I think of the enemies I have made and of those who would hope to profit by my death. It is not imagination. . . . You know something about these strange Malay things from the jungle that can be put in the food or the drink to kill slowly and no doctor can find out why the person has died?"

"I've heard about them. But only the natives know what they are and how to prepare them."

"True! When Hodoh was alive I trusted her people, they liked me. Every day she was in the cook house when meals were being made. But now nobody is there and this is a rich plantation. Many people would like to own it. Louis, that foolish boy, who has no head for business, he sells everything for money to spend on women in Amboyna. He is like a child."

"It's a ghastly idea," Tony said with a thoughtful crease between his blue eyes. "If what you say is true, I daresay I'll have to be on the look-out."

"You are a young man. You have not been here long enough to make enemies. You will be alert."

"Righto! It's merely the beastly idea of the thing." To the speaker, old Hendrick's suspicions sounded fantastic and yet, upon second thought, he agreed that there might be something in them, for anything was possible out here in this incredible land. Perhaps Louis himself—But the visitor quickly dismissed that idea. Louis was a worthless scamp, dishonest in money matters, and openly immoral—unmoral was the better word—in his

relations with women, nevertheless he was likeable. He was intelligent and cultured: he was genuinely fond of his father, too. More than likely, the latter's enemy, if he had one, was some native in his employ, some fellow around the house who nursed a personal grudge. In all probability, however, the whole trouble could be traced back to that very gluttony in which the Dutchman took pride.

"I am obliged to go away because of the malaria that is always with me," Scheutema was saying, "but it is because of the other that I wish to go very immediately. And that brings me back to Louis. What must I do with him? I cannot take him with me to Holland, he is too much Malay: he would hate it there in my quiet village and he would bring me disgrace among my friends with his conduct among the girls. I wish him to stay here, but who will employ him? Nobody. They all know how lazy he is. And if he is not employed he may steal some money and be arrested. What peace for me, then?"

"Not much, I'm afraid." Tony rubbed his chin meditatively. "You can imagine I'm not keen on having a fellow like that about the place but if it will help you out I'll keep him on."

"It would take off the last of my worries," Hendrick admitted with relief. "Just the same I could not suggest it until I told you all the truths about Louis. It would not be honest."

"Thanks for doing it, sir. I've always known you were square, Mr. Scheutema."

"Then everything is settled. That is very good." Hendrick smiled and shook Tony's hand again. "You will, of course, stay here tonight—there is no need to fear the dinner: I shall watch the cook-house. Tomorrow early you and I will go to Amboyna to sign the papers. I shall not come back. In two days there is a boat for Batavia. I shall go on it. Mr. van Hoesen, I know, will let you leave him at once so that you can come in here. He is a very decent man."

They were talking of this and that planting matter when Louis came sauntering towards the bungalow. He was clad in well-cut brown riding breeches, leather boots to his knees, and a khaki shirt. He was about Tony's age—twenty-five—and he had straight, rather good looking features, but his small hands and feet, a skin the color of weak cocoa, and soft, dark, lazy eyes unmistakably bespoke the Malay in him.

"*Hul-lo*, Tony, old thing!" he cried, mounting the steps. "Topping to see you. *Hullo*, pater! Deuce of a sultry evening, eh?" Louis affected a carefully acquired English manner of speaking, and especially so before strangers.

They returned his greeting amiably.

Scheutema, Junior, was not surprised to see Tony as he often came over and spent the night there. "Can I mix a spot for anyone else?" he inquired, pouring out a drink for himself.

No, thanks. They'd had theirs.

"What luck with the shooting?" Tony inquired.

"Only fairish. Bagged a red deer—the only one I saw. But on the way back I spotted a big sea hawk flying right overhead. A hundred to one chance with a rifle, thinks I, but might as well take a crack just to keep the old eye in form. Ping! And down came mister sea hawk in a lovely nose dive. As sweet a shot as ever you saw."

"Pretty smooth work," said Tony.

"If you were so good a planter—as you are a good shot," began Hendrick. . . .

"I'd own half the Dutch Indies," Louis finished. "But I'm not. It doesn't interest me." He laughed, gulped down another *pahit*, and went off to his bath.

Almost as soon as they sat down to dinner Hendrick said: "Louis, I have a surprise for you."

"I like surprises, pater. Fire away."

"I have sold the plantation to Anthony."

Louis stiffened, glanced quickly from one man to the other, then looked down at his plate.

"Well," he said, raising his eyes after a moment, "that *is* rather a surprise. What am I expected to say about it? Congratulate you?" He smiled and endeavored to speak lightly, but his chagrin was plainly discernible.

While the deal was being explained in detail a look of sullen resentment came into Louis' eyes. However, it did not last long and he brightened up considerably when told that he was to remain on with Tony. The more he thought of being identified with the young Eng-

lishman, the better he liked the idea for it promised very definite social advantages and furthermore old Hendrick had been guarding altogether too well against his son's pilfering tricks of late.

Later, when the three parted for the night, Louis said with apparent heartiness, "At least I'm glad the place is being taken over by a gentleman. I fancy we'll rub along pretty well together, Tony. What?"

"Yes. Yes. Of course we shall," the visitor assured him.

Tony had answered at random for during the past hour he had been thinking of a girl in England, a girl whose sunny brown hair had blown about her eyes in short, curling strands when they tramped the wind-swept downs or played golf together. He could hear her laugh, now: he could see her grey eyes, steady and humorous, lighting up at the news of his—of their—good fortune. She had a small nose, slightly contemptuous at the tip, and a firm chin below an impetuous mouth, the most adorable, the most kissable mouth in the world, he felt sure. Night after night they had danced on air at *Ciro's* or the Embassy Club. She had promised to marry him. But it had been an indefinite promise and its realization had seemed problematical for Tony's salary was small. Now some good fairy, in the form of a fat old Dutchman, had waved a magic wand, and everything was changed. He could claim her—tonight—tomorrow—any time.

Too excited to sleep at once, he filled a pipe and sat by the open window of his bedroom. There was no

moon, but the stars glittered like a million pale aquamarines set in a vast inverted bowl of deepest blue velvet. Beyond the stately kanari and tamarind trees he could see the smooth water and hear the lazy waves breaking and running up the white beach. The air was heavy with the fragrance of foliage and of slumbering flowers. "Pamela will be enraptured with this place," he thought. "We'll wander along that beach on moonlight nights. I must have those mangy lawns weeded and put in shape. And there ought to be a tennis court. I'll make one. Pamela must keep up her tennis."

It was late when he undressed and got into bed, and as he happily made plans for his life with Pamela the monotonous call of a night bird lulled him to sleep.

When Tony took possession of the plantation and made a careful survey of the premises he found that he had indeed acquired a bargain. Due to sparse tapping in their younger days the rubber trees were large and healthy; most of the coffee, between ten and twenty years old, was at its best, and there was much more land under cocoa, pepper and coconuts than he had expected. For the most part, the property was rather neglected and weeds were plentiful, but an augmented labor force—coolies were to be had in unlimited numbers at ten guilders a month and a kati of rice per day—was soon at work putting matters to rights. And, too, in the thick jungle beyond the cultivated area Tony found large quantities of wild

rubber, teak and mahogany. Sixty coolies were turned in there to tap trees and fell timber.

All this gave the new owner a feeling akin to what he had experienced in his youth when opening Christmas parcels. From daybreak to dark he toiled like a galley slave, and the coolies, who liked him because he was undeniably a tuan and treated them well, responded readily to his spurring and accomplished far more than they had under the easy-going Hendrick. At the end of the first month the value of produce shipped exceeded all outgoings by something over ten thousand guilders. Tony was jubilant; he'd have the place paid for in three years at this rate.

During the first few days after the change in ownership Louis had plunged into the work with a commendable zest, but his enthusiasm quickly died and he returned to his old habits. When not away shooting or fishing he was usually to be found on the veranda of his bungalow, stretched at full length on a rattan lounge, a cigarette in his mouth and a whiskey-soda by his side, either reading or idly turning the pages of some illustrated English weekly. He subscribed to all of them and he never tired of the pictures of the Duchess of So-and-so in Hyde Park; of Lord and Lady Such-and-such at some point-to-point meet. It pleased his snobbish little soul to imagine that those people were his intimates and that he belonged to their world.

There were times when Tony felt like hauling the lazy half-breed over the coals for his idleness but on second

thought he realized that Louis was better away from the coolies. They hated his lofty swagger, and his presence only put them into sulks and retarded the work. After all, the plantation had been presented to him and he could well afford the small bit of pay he gave his benefactor's son. Only when complaints reached him of Louis' attentions to some unwilling woman did Tony lose his temper and threaten him with discharge. Louis would then listen with a slightly supercilious air of boredom and promise it would never occur again. But of course it did.

At his own request, young Scheutema had moved to the smaller bungalow. This seemed like an act at once tactful and considerate on his part and Tony, of course, had no idea that the fellow's object in making the change was to enable him the more easily to get to and from the godown when everyone else was sleeping. Often in the small hours of the morning Louis would flit through the trees to the store, open the door with his skeleton key and pass out to a ghost-like waiting figure bags of produce that had not been marked and checked for shipment. This buyer of stolen goods was a Chinese trader from the other side of the island who carried the bags down to his *prahu* on a shadowy part of the beach, paid Louis considerably less than the market price in cash, and departed as silently as he had come.

In six months Tony had worked wonders with that plantation. Every square foot of it was as neat and as well cared for as a Kentish hop garden. More land had

been cleared and planted, new buildings had been erected, the old ones had been repaired. Painters had finished renovating both bungalows. The ornamental garden, an unkempt wilderness when Hendrick departed, had been converted into a beauty spot; borders of crotons grew by the raked paths; brilliant splashes of bougainvillea, poinsettia, and red and yellow lantanas contrasted pleasingly with the dignified feather palm and graceful clumps of bamboo. The white ribbon-like markings of the grass tennis court invited players, and shady rustic seats added a note of cool restfulness. On the balcony of the bungalow were enormous blue porcelain pots containing jasmines, delicate ferns and orchids which formed a special attraction for humming birds and multi-colored butterflies.

To the beautifying of the garden and bungalow Tony had given most careful thought, and the supervision of his plans brought him unbounded pleasure. He was doing something for Pamela. And she would arrive on the next boat.

It had been agreed that she would come out and marry him in Amboyna inasmuch as he dared not leave the plantation even for a few weeks. Things were going along most satisfactorily, but he knew they would not continue to do so in his absence. He did not care to get a stranger in, even temporarily, and Louis was utterly undependable. Furthermore, he had begun to suspect that the latter was up to his old tricks. Twice recently money had been taken from Tony's desk drawer. He

had questioned the servants closely and found that on each occasion Louis had been seen leaving the bungalow shortly thereafter. This, of course, was inconclusive evidence upon which to formulate a direct charge of such gravity, nevertheless it certainly looked bad.

Up to this time Tony had paid off, in addition to interest, almost a quarter of what he owed old Scheutema. A representative of the Netherlands Bank, who was invited to inspect the property, had valued it at seven hundred thousand guilders, and Tony, always with a keen eye to business, had arranged a new mortgage at five per cent which enabled him to discharge his debt to Hendrick in full and effect a saving thereby.

Tony was the first person up the companion-way when Pamela's boat reached Amboyna. The port doctor and customs officer smiled as he pushed past them with a cheery apology. They understood. Never had life seemed so good to him as when he stood on that deck grasping Pamela's two hands and drinking in her fresh English beauty. Interested passengers—portly Dutch matrons, missionaries, bug-hunters—cast admiring glances at this tall, good-looking young man and the lovely girl who faced him.

They were married late that morning, and after a champagne party which Mr. van Hoesen insisted upon giving, they left in an awning-covered motor launch for the plantation. It was a dream voyage for both of them.

On reaching her new home Pamela was enchanted

with everything. "Why, Tony," she cried, her eyes dancing, "this is a positive Paradise! I had no idea I was coming to anything so beautiful!"

"It wasn't always quite so bright," he told her, well repaid by her enthusiasm for all his weary labors. "I made it like this for you."

She patted his bronzed hand affectionately—and he was happy.

Later, while they were having tea on the shady side of the balcony, Louis, clad in immaculate white and carefully groomed, called from below.

"Oh, come up, Louis," Tony called back.

Louis was presented to the bride; he chatted pleasantly for a few minutes, then went away.

"What an awfully nice assistant you've got," Pamela said when he was out of earshot.

"Not half a bad chap," Tony replied. In his letters he had not mentioned Louis as one of the reasons why he had been unable to go home to be married and he felt disinclined to mar a perfect day by a bothersome explanation.

During the ensuing weeks Louis often dropped in at the bungalow. Tony could well have done without his company, but as the fellow was always so obviously grateful for companionship he lacked the heart to raise an objection. Besides, Pamela might think him boorish if he did.

And then, with a suddenness that was amazing, a most unexpected change came over Louis. From being a

worthless drone he blossomed forth into an indefatigable worker. He was on the job from the time the big tom-tom summoned the coolies to early morning roll-call until the ring of axe and scrub hook ceased and darkness descended. Like a general supervising the operations of his troops he went from latex shed to copra drying plant, from nurseries to godown. Planting, tapping, weeding, clearing, gathering the produce, every branch of the work, in fact, came under his now watchful eye. And his manner of treating the coolies altered. No longer was he brusque and overbearing: he handled them with that tact which is necessary to get the best out of a Malay. In the evenings he came to Tony's bungalow to talk over the next day's work, offering suggestions here and there, many of them helpful. He reduced his drinking to a decent moderation and he ceased to amuse himself with the women on the place. It was as if he had been injected with some powerful serum which had changed his entire nature.

Tony was astonished and a bit skeptical for a while but as time went on and Louis' exemplary behaviour continued he began to wonder if the fellow had not indeed turned over a new leaf, or if he had not passed through something like a distinct phase in his moral development. It really seemed as if the healthy blood of his father had triumphed over the feebler strain inherited from his mother. Such awakenings do happen occasionally and while the owner of the plantation could not bring himself to trust implicitly in his employee's honesty he could not

deny the proofs of his industry and he, Tony, was honest enough to pay tribute thereto. Louis was enormously pleased at the recognition. He thanked Tony and they had a drink. Thereafter they frequently had a drop together in Louis's bungalow when the day's work was done.

Life ran along agreeably for the Beresfords until Tony contracted malaria, or swamp fever, or something of the sort. He dosed himself in the customary manner but the thing proved to be uncommonly stubborn and the local doctor could not seem to help him greatly. He would feel splendid for a while, then experience lassitude, chills, a dull discomfort in his head. He often had to combat an almost overpowering drowsiness and not infrequently a low fever that sapped his vitality. As a consequence he grew irritable. Pamela and he did not get along as well as they should.

They quarreled one day, and over nothing. A photograph of her, a small picture in a leather case which Tony had carried these two years, disappeared. It was an old picture, the case was shabby but he loved it. Pamela took the loss so lightly that he was offended: he growled something about her lack of sentiment and she resented his tone. Just how the quarrel developed, it was their very first, he could not later remember. Undoubtedly it was all his fault but he was horribly nervous and thoroughly miserable at the moment and for some reason he derived a malicious satisfaction from yielding to his anger. He accused her, quite unreasonably, of shirking

her household responsibilities. Things were at sixes and sevens with the servants, they were becoming lazy and more than usually incompetent. Pamela, of course, defended herself with spirit: harsh words were spoken; there were tears. It was wretched: husband and wife made themselves horribly unhappy.

They went to sleep that night still angry with each other and probably they would have awakened in the same frame of mind except for the fact that Tony took a turn for the worse during the night. Pamela was awakened by his groaning and found him in a cold sweat of agony. Severe pains in the stomach had seized him and she was frightened. It was a matter of hours before she managed to make him comfortable.

Gratefully he thanked her for her tenderness and her concern, abjectly he apologized for his beastly behaviour on the day before. In a moment she melted.

But as he faded off to sleep along about daylight with Pamela's cool shoulder against his he came abruptly back to consciousness. His brain was clear, clearer than it had been for days, and a thought leaped into his mind with the suddenness of an electric shock.

Hendrick Scheutema had complained of pains in his stomach, of drowsiness, of bad health, and he attributed it to slow poisoning. Good Heavens! Tony had been too deeply engrossed in his affairs to recall more than vaguely that talk with the Dutchman and besides this "malaria" had come on by imperceptible degrees. Malaria, indeed! . . . What if Pamela were taken next?

This query almost brought the man off his pillow, but he forced himself to lie still. This was no time to get panicky. He must not alarm his wife. God knew she had enough in him to put up with. How rotten he had been about that photograph— Photograph! A queer suspicion began to take form. That picture had been stolen, but why? By whom? . . . No servant would have taken it. . . . If he were being poisoned the drug did not come to him in his food or Pamela would have felt it, too. . . . *Louis!* Those gin *pahits!* He had seen the fellow staring at Pamela with a queer light in his big brown eyes. . . . This recent explosion of industry! The filthy, lecherous cur!

Tony found his body wet with sweat once more and some restless movement awoke his wife but he assured her quietly that he was all right, never better. He kissed her and she went back to sleep with a drowsy murmur of thanksgiving. He lay awake for the rest of the night with a murderous rage in his heart.

It was useless to accuse Louis of his villainy. The little devil would blandly deny it. A waste of time, likewise, to search his bungalow for the drug, the herb or whatever it might be. It was doubtless in some form which no European would recognize. Nor could he rouse the fellow to anger, goad him into a display of feeling which would afford an excuse to kill him: Louis was impervious to insults. All the same, he deserved killing. He could be sent away, of course, but in Tony's present frame of mind he could not bring himself to consider that: he

would as soon have considered allowing a cobra to escape unharmed from Pamela's flower garden.

The next morning after breakfast, as he filled his pipe and lighted it somewhat tentatively, he said:

"Louis dodges about here quite a bit when I'm not around, doesn't he?"

Pamela, who had sat down late, looked up from the mangosteen she was dividing and nodded.

"Fairly often. Why?"

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to show him you don't enjoy his calls? He's half Malay, you know, and the coolies chatter about anything like that. I'd hate to have them link your name, even casually, with his."

"How absurd! My dear old thing, he doesn't even come up on the veranda. Merely says a few words from the lawn. Louis is quite a good egg."

"Just the same, I wish——"

"Jealous, dear?"

Tony smiled and nodded. "Frightfully!"

"That's good." Pamela dimpled at him. "Surely you don't imagine I've encouraged him in the least?"

"What a monstrous suggestion!" The husband went around the table and bent over her chair. He kissed her and said with a laugh, "I'm a sick man and I insist upon being spoiled. You must let me be as jealous as I choose and as unreasonable as a Turk. I love having you here, all to myself, and I hope you don't hanker greatly for outsiders."

"I don't, darling, at least—not yet." Pamela smiled

happily, pulled his face down to hers and kissed him on the mouth.

Louis saw less of his employer's wife thereafter and although he gave no sign that he was aware of any change in her attitude towards him he writhed inwardly. Inordinate egotism persuaded him that she avoided him because she felt herself irresistibly drawn in his direction. Or it might be that Tony feared him as a rival and was undertaking to keep her out of his way. In either event he suffered less chagrin than disappointment and it comforted him to realize that the husband was fading daily. Not even Pamela's watchful eyes could see or measure the full effect of those occasional gin *pahits*. A few weeks more at this rate and— Louis took the little leather photograph case from inside his shirt and devoured it with hungry, sensual eyes. A dozen times a day it was damp from his kisses.

But Tony abruptly turned teetotaler. He dropped in as usual at the smaller bungalow to talk over plantation affairs and he was friendly, cordial; but he declared that liquor had gone back on him. Every so often he got "liverish", he proposed to lay off alcohol for a week or two.

A week or two! That would negative the work of that jungle sap which Louis combined so delicately and so tastily with his gin; it would set him on his feet again. Beresford was unlike the usual European who becomes wedded through habits of tropic indulgence to a daily ration of liquor: drinking, with him, was an indulgence

and he drank for sociability. The idiot! The pig! Louis was furious and he pondered the situation in some dismay.

"Seems a dog's age since I had a gun in my hand," he announced one morning. "I believe I'll toddle out for a shot later, if you think I've earned an afternoon off."

"Indeed you have earned it," Tony agreed heartily. "Everything's in fine shape, thanks to you. You ought to get out oftener."

"You've been sticking to the grind, yourself. Better come along."

"No, thanks! I don't feel up to much. . . . Still, I don't know—" The speaker hesitated, frowned, then he changed his mind. "Maybe it *will* do me good. You're on! We'll start soon after tiffin."

A merciless sun struck at them as they set out about two o'clock, but a short walk brought them into the partial protection of rubber trees. Soon they left the plantation behind and entered the dense tropical forest, following for a while a narrow path that led eventually to a small *kampong* in a remote part of the island where it was said the natives occasionally indulged in a surreptitious orgy of cannibalism. Magnificent trees, giants of the jungle, to which clung masses of snake-like creepers, met overhead, forming a cool canopy. Underneath was a matted growth of vines, ferns and brakes, of flowers and plants with red and white-spotted, heart-shaped leaves. A pleasant smell of dampness rose from the fallen leaves and fecund earth.

Louis halted finally to say, "I think we'd have a better chance of getting something if we separated. There's no wind. Suppose I work round the north end of that little fresh water lake and you go round by the south. We'll meet at the big *kayu besi* tree on the other side; you know, the one where the paths come together. One of us is sure to start a deer, and the other may get a shot."

"All right," Tony agreed.

He was about to turn away when Louis said: "That looks like a peach of a gun you've got, old man. I wonder if you'd mind my trying it. I've been thinking about getting one like it."

"Take it, by all means," Tony handed the weapon to him. "I'll have a go with yours."

"Thanks awfully. Go slow, take it easy and you're bound to stir up a *babirusa* at least. See you soon."

Tony proceeded for a few yards, then a sharp look assured him that he was out of his companion's sight and he broke into a run. He ran at top speed, crouching low and dodging furtively across open spaces where there was danger of observation, speeding his feet the faster where the undergrowth was thick. . . . Thank Heaven he had not tried this a week ago or his legs would have refused duty! As it was, they tired quickly and soon he felt those damnable cramps in his stomach again. He was afraid they would double him up. He was even weaker than he had suspected and the heat, coupled with his exertions, nauseated him. Onward he plunged. . . . He began to gasp and to retch, sweat streamed from his

pores. It ran into his eyes and blinded him and he tasted the salt of it. . . . Louis had told him to go slow, take it easy. Indeed! Clever stunt, trading guns. . . . Killed by a bullet from his own rifle. Smart boy, Louis! Smarter than a white man. Oh, yes! . . . How slowly he was moving! He must have run a long way, and those pains were getting stiffer every minute. A joke on him if he dropped dead before he reached that *kayu besi* tree: all the luck would be Louis'. . . . But there it was: he was in time. Reeling, stumbling, fighting for his breath, he flung himself forward. For a while he lay writhing and groaning among the ferns.

Louis trotted steadily and purposefully down the path he had selected; he pulled the bolt of Tony's rifle and made sure there was a shell in the chamber. What a simpleton, that Beresford! And how overbearing! The swine! He had the mind of a child: how could he cope with a superior intellect? . . . Pamela would be shocked, of course—the other way would have been much the better—but she could be comforted. She'd have to stay on for a while and run the plantation, for it was all they had and she was a practical woman. Smart, too. Smarter than any Malay. And she had read his mind. . . . So much the better. Women hated calm, phlegmatic men. Elegance, fire, good looks, passion, was what appealed to them and he'd show her the meaning of passion. . . . No trouble about marrying her, there were more ways than one to make sure of that and thereby to make sure of the plantation. His plantation. . . . Every woman

he knew was crazy to marry him. And the idea of old Hendrick giving, practically giving, the place to this offensive mannered stranger. Louis had never forgiven his father for that.

He was nearing the end of the lake now where the paths joined, and it was time to slow down and get his breath. . . . That was better! His heart was beating evenly once more, hand and eye were steady. The earth in the path was damp and his feet were noiseless when he stole forward.

Ah-h! . . . Through an imperfect screen of leaves and fern fronds at a turn in the path he caught a glimpse of Tony's coat. Cautiously he moved onward, a foot at a time, his face a ghastly white, his mouth contorted with nervous twitchings. Forty yards. . . . Thirty five. The closer, the better. He had a foolish desire to laugh but for the moment he restrained it. Tony was resting at the foot of the tree, facing in the opposite direction, his white pith helmet was pushed back on his head, so far back that the rim of it hid his neck. Four inches below that rim and a bit to the left was the bull's-eye: Louis' face blazed as he smoothly lifted his rifle and nestled his cheek close against the shock. The sights fell into alignment, he drew them fine, then with an unhurried pressure of his right finger he squeezed the trigger.

Crack! . . . Louis Scheutema was scarcely aware of the splitting detonation for along with it all the hate, all the jealousy, all the malevolence he had repressed these many months exploded and his very soul was rocked, his

self control was shattered. His lips made no sound but there was a shouting in his brain, he was drunk with exultation. . . . All over! That was that! And so simple, too—

He blinked and thrust his head forward, his neck seemed to lengthen: there was something reptilian in the alert and watchful pose he assumed. Automatically he ejected the spent shell and reloaded his weapon.

How odd! Tony's body had been perceptibly shaken by that murderous expanding bullet but it had neither crumpled nor sagged forward as he had expected. Not even the helmet was dislodged. Something queer about that. For interminable seconds during which his heart leaped and fluttered at some suggestion as yet unformed he stood frozen, his mind paralyzed, his mouth open.

Then he breathed. Killed instantly, without a kick or a tremor. That was it. The corpse was supported by its own weight against the trunk of the tree. Of course. All the same it was startling.

The jungle was as silent as a church. Following that blast of sound it held its breath and listened. Then something stirred! At Louis' back there was the faint rustle of parting leaves and he became aware of a presence, of something alive and menacing, so close at hand that his flesh cringed and his nerves shrieked a warning. He whirled, cat-like, to behold—a ghost, the ghost of a hatless, coatless Tony Beresford whose face, twisted with rage and with pain, glared at him over the barrel of a rifle. Louis' rifle. That face was streaming with sweat,

the hair above it was matted, the shirt beneath it and the pants, too, were wringing wet and stained with the black mould of the woods, the lips were drawn back in a dog-snarl. It was a ghastly, shining devil mask that peered at Louis over the fore-shortened gun barrel with its round black center of death.

A voice issued from the apparition but it was meaningless, words conveyed nothing to Louis in this instant of mental and physical paralysis, upon his Malay brain they registered only as lip movements. Then his muscles jerked, the rifle flew to his shoulder and he fired. All three acts were involuntary and simultaneous. The forest roared.

Ha! . . . Louis Scheutema uttered a fierce cry of triumph, the earth rocked under him and the world spun: then a sudden sense of well-being flooded him. His brain awoke and he was in complete mastery of himself. Tony was dead this time, his body had been blown away in a blinding flash of flame and Louis was alone. He was whole, unharmed, reborn; his voice, raised in a thunderous shout, bent the trees and caused their branches to thresh drunkenly: his breath was the hurricane and it laid the forest low: he strode the earth like a giant. The vigor of ten thousand heroes coursed through him: he sang in a voice louder than the tempest. . . . Pamela! Her warm lips and her soft body were against his, she loved him and the bliss of that certainty was ineffable. . . . He was back in the big bungalow at heavenly ease in the long chair with the gay colored

cretonne cushions. It was cool: Pamela was bending over him, her arms enfolded his body, her lips were pressed hungrily to his. . . . Pamela! This was Elysium—

Tony stooped over the dead body and with shaking hands he rifled it. He averted his eyes meanwhile for Louis' head did not resemble a head at all.

"Bloody swine!" he growled when Pamela's photograph lay in his palm. He hid the picture in his own pocket, then he exchanged weapons with the dead man and searched carefully underfoot until he retrieved an empty shell, the which he also pocketed. This done he went to the *kayu besi* tree, lifted his helmet from the stick supporting it and shook the stuffing of grass and ferns out of his coat. Curiously he stared at a neatly bored hole scarcely larger than a lead pencil which pierced it. . . . Good shot, Louis! And a smart fellow. Smarter than a white man. Like hell he was!

The big, well-fed, half-caste official who had come from Amboyna to conduct an inquiry sat on the bungalow balcony, toying with his fifth or sixth *pahit*. His investigation had been the customary casual affair.

"Well," he said, "I think that will be all, Mr. Beresford. And I thank you. It is most clearly a case of accident. Who can say how it happened? A man is out shooting. He is found killed by a bullet from his own gun. Death was instantaneous." He raised his massive shoulders and spread out both hands in an eloquent gesture. "These things happen."

"No doubt," Tony agreed with a nod.

"Now I go," said the official rising. "I have been most sorry to take up your valuable time, Mr. Beresford, but it is my duty. I cannot help it. Good afternoon, sir."

"Good day—and many thanks."

Tony watched the bulky form strut importantly down the gravel path and disappear among the trees. The distant whir of a gardener's lawn mower sounded peaceful and reassuring.

"Much the simplest way out of it," he thought, and went inside.

ARTHUR CRENSHAW AND SAID ABDUL BURAAALA



THE BARBARIAN

VI

The Barbarian

NO REGRETS, dear?" Arthur Crenshaw inquired of his wife.

Joan raised her misty eyes to his. "Absolutely none. I was never so thrilled." They were standing shoulder to shoulder against the steamer rail watching a Channel haze blot out the coast of England. "I'm a little teary at cutting the last string," she admitted, "but all my life I've dreamed about the East. Crowded cities, with funny sights and smells. Temples. Junks. Coolies. Potentates. Elephants. Ivory and jade. Oh, Arthur, I'm the happiest woman in the world!"

"There's the climate to think about, you know. And discomforts and poor food——"

"Bosh! We can stand them. Think of coming back all hard and brown, with the old exchequer bulging."

"You're the best little sport in the world," Arthur asserted feelingly. "I'll work like a slave."

"Of course. Wouldn't we have been silly to let this opportunity slip? Well, there's the last of home and mother. Let's life up our chins, old dear, and start in by making friends with these people: they may do us some good in Singapore."

It was easy to become acquainted with the other passengers many of whom were Army and Navy people returning from leave. There were, too, a number of merchants, planters, buyers and the like and all were more than friendly to the attractive young couple who were bound East for the first time. Crenshaw had an easy manner, his good looking young wife was an eager, animated creature: adventure had kindled a fire in her. I used to watch these two striding around the deck together. They were a healthy, wholesome looking pair, and they seemed to be getting an awful lot of fun out of life. I hoped the East would be decent to them.

Between themselves the Crenshaws agreed, after a few days, that by far the most interesting person on board was the one passenger whom they found it hardest to meet—a huge, swarthy Oriental of middle age who occupied the finest cabin on the ship. It was the purser who made known his identity.

“That’s Said Abdul Buraala,” he explained. “Part Arab and part Malay, I believe. Magnificent specimen, isn’t he? College bred, too. He’s the head of the whole Mohammedan show in the Dutch East Indies.”

“I suppose he’s fabulously rich,” Joan said.

“Oh, rather! Money in the family for generations. Palaces, plantations, pearl fisheries——”

“No wonder he’s so exclusive.”

The purser shook his head. “Your first trip East, isn’t it, Mrs. Crenshaw? He’s not exclusive. It’s his—color. The whites and the natives don’t mingle in this country.”

"'This country?'" We're not in the Orient. Surely he's a—gentleman."

"Of course. And I've no doubt he'd be delighted to know everybody aboard but we're bound East and—it isn't done. Nobody understands that better than he."

Joan furrowed her pretty brows. "It seems a pity! He's so distinguished, so handsome. No doubt he's perfectly wretched."

The purser smiled. "You'll make yourself wretched if you try to break down established tabus."

Joan said no more but later that day when Arthur emerged from the writing room he found her talking to the Oriental himself.

"Oh, hello dear!" she called. "I want you to meet Said Abdul Buraala. He was sitting alone and I stormed his solitude."

The Said bowed, he spoke in a deep voice. "Your charming wife is most gracious. I appreciate her friendliness."

For a while the three talked and Arthur found himself warming to this stranger. No one could long remain unresponsive to his dignity, his poise, his deference, his courtesy.

When the stewards appeared with the luncheon cocktails Arthur inquired, "Will you have a spot with us, Mr. Buraala?"

Briefly the Said hesitated, then he inquired, "Won't you permit me to play the host in my cabin?"

"Whatever you prefer."

"Thank you. Then say—in ten minutes? I am in suite A.A."

When Arthur and Joan knocked on Buraala's door they were received into a sitting room larger and handsomer than they believed existed on the ship. Vases of flowers stood about, there were quantities of books with English, French and Arabic titles, also boxes of cigars and cigarettes. On a table was a tray with vermouth, gin, bitters and cracked ice, in a silver pail reposed a bottle, the neck of which was wrapped in gold foil.

"Would you prefer a cocktail or a glass of Cliquot, Madame?" the Said inquired.

"How festive!" Joan exclaimed. "I'd love champagne."

The cork was deftly unwired, soon the three were sipping their drinks.

"What a splendid room," Arthur commented.

"Which affords me an opportunity to explain why I spend so much time in it and why I asked you to come here." Buraala spoke gravely but without embarrassment. "Nothing would please me more than to have you young people return often but it will be better for you not to do so. I understand you are going to Singapore to live."

"Yes. I'm joining the firm of Burkett, Stone and Burkett, Solicitors."

"They wanted an Oxford man and the pay is three times what Arthur was getting," Joan explained. "It's sure to lead to a junior partnership."

"My congratulations. Under the circumstances, you

must forget our meeting and pass me by as if we were strangers."

"Oh, I say!" Arthur began and his wife likewise protested.

With a smile the Said shook his head. "In London, or on the Continent we could be friends but not in the East, and already this ship is a part of the East. It is the decree of your people and you must abide by it or you will suffer. I would not have it on my conscience that two such delightful young people had injured their prospects through me."

"How perfectly silly and unfair," Joan exclaimed and her husband agreed. The Said only shook his head.

It was not without some discussion that the couple finally promised to heed his advice.

"Darned decent of him to warn us," Arthur remarked as he and Joan descended to the dining saloon. "He made me ashamed of—of white intolerance."

"My ears are still burning," she agreed. "It's so absurd, with a man like that. He's a real personage and probably a lot better bred than most of us. I feel awfully small."

The Crenshaws saw little of the Said thereafter for there were days when he did not come on deck at all and when he did appear he managed to avoid them without seeming to do so. It was while the ship was steaming through the Red Sea that they learned he was ill. Malaria the doctor pronounced it, and a frightfully bad attack.

"I say," Joan spoke to her husband privately. "That

doctor was pretty stony. Don't you think we should make sure our nabob is getting proper care?"

"Nobody could criticize us for showing a spark of Christian solicitude."

"Let's pop in on him."

"We'd be worms if we didn't. Come along."

The Said was indeed a sick man. Fever blazed from his eyes, below them lay shadows so heavy as to resemble bruises in the flesh. His nose was thinner and more hawklike than ever, his bloodless lips were drawn taut over his teeth.

"We just learned you were ill," Joan told him. "I'm sure we can do something to help or to cheer you up."

The man smiled, a faint sparkle came into his leaden eyes. "That is most charitable and most—unwise."

"Oh, to the devil with that rot!" Arthur protested. "Are they taking good care of you?"

Buraala confessed that aside from the doctor's visits he received practically no attention and Joan voiced her indignation. Forthwith she took charge. She rearranged pillows, mixed medicines, tidied up the cabin and sprinkled it with Eau de Cologne. Thereafter she and Arthur returned several times a day.

The Said's fever broke at Colombo and as he improved, the young couple spent more and more time with him. They read aloud, they discussed their hopes and their ambitions and eagerly pumped him for information about the mysteries ahead of them. The invalid gave them much advice and told them many stories—strange

tales of the Spice Islands and the pearl fisheries. He talked well on almost any subject—religion, music, literature—in fact, he surprised his listeners with the breadth of his culture. More than once he warned them that the East is likely to cast an evil spell upon Europeans and begged them to be ever watchful of her whims.

Farewells were said at Singapore before the young couple landed, and where the Said, now fully recovered, was to board a Dutch packet for Amboyna. When he had again thanked them for their kindness he said to Arthur, "Will you permit me to make a trifling present to your wife as a token of my gratitude for her charity?"

Taking a little box from his pocket he raised the lid disclosing a magnificent round pearl set in a platinum ring.

The Crenshaws stared at the jewel wide-eyed. Neither of them had ever seen such a regal gem.

Joan was the first to find her voice:

"Oh, you *mustn't*! I *couldn't*—" she gasped.

Arthur nodded. "You're very generous but we'll think of you often without such a costly reminder. Please don't misunderstand——"

"I feared you would refuse," Buraala said regretfully. "Very well. But I shall keep you always in my thoughts. Good-bye."

Singapore, the Crenshaws told each other when they were finally settled, was the ideal spot. They had found a charming bungalow in the European residential part of

Tanglin—it was green and white and it nestled amid blooms. There were sloping lawns and strange flowering trees with extraordinary foliage. It was Heaven. Friends were easily made, too: there were dinners, dancing, golf, tennis and week-end shooting parties.

Arthur toiled. In his mind at all times was that prospect of a junior partnership and he never lost sight of it, but he ran pretty deeply into debt. It is so easy to live beyond one's means where business is conducted on the insidious chit system. However, a few debts were nothing to worry about: most of the younger people ran behind at first, so he told himself.

Joan asked him more than once if they were not going too fast but he could not bear to see her skimp so he assured her that her apprehensions were groundless.

Not until they had been in Singapore a year and a half did Arthur, always careless in money matters, take serious stock of his financial situation. Then he was dismayed at the total of his debts. Before he could bring himself to talk it over with Joan, a stock broker friend offered him a chance to recoup. It seemed there was a rubber company which was certain to raise its dividend rate at its next directors meeting a week hence. The broker had it straight from the manager, a close pal. The shares had gone up considerably, they would double when the news was announced. Arthur would be a fool if he didn't get in on it.

"But I have no money to speculate with," the latter confessed.

He didn't need a cent, the broker pointed out. He, himself, would carry the shares for a week or so.

Arthur considered. He knew the man quite well, a bit of extra cash would certainly come in handy. "Put me down for—say two hundred shares," he said finally.

"Two hundred! You mean a thousand. My dear fellow, the thing's a sitter. Lash out. You can't lose."

There was some further discussion: later that morning Arthur received a contract note showing that one thousand shares had been bought for his account. The sight of it appalled him and he telephoned the broker that he had chilblains and had decided to sell as soon as he could do so without a loss. The market closed that day two points off and Arthur did not sleep well.

Steadily the price fell and a panic seized Crenshaw: fearfully he waited for the directors meeting. The day came and the dividend was not raised. It was suspended. Arthur was sick, the broker was apologetic. Accidents would happen, he declared.

Crenshaw's shares were sold at a loss of more than nine thousand dollars and the broker's firm refused to accept payment over a period of time. Their client would have to raise the money somewhere, somehow.

In desperation, Arthur put the matter before Calthorpe Burkett but the catastrophe left the elder man unmoved. Burkett showed no sympathy, on the contrary he declared that he had foreseen something of this sort and his firm could not keep in its employ a man who speculated beyond his means. It was peculiar, but the East played

havoc with most Europeans. It rotted their fibre. Not one in ten could survive. Tickets to England would be provided and Arthur and his wife could sail on the next steamer.

Crenshaw was staggered. He argued, he pleaded, but Burkett was adamant.

Finally, in heat the younger man confessed, "I made a fool of myself, granted. But I'm damned if I'll run out of this place like a criminal. I'll get another job and pay off my debts before I budge."

Joan was aghast at the calamity but she took it bravely. The blame, she asserted, was more hers than Arthur's: she should have realized their extravagance. But she would cut expenses to the bone and they would make good the debt.

The code of the East is liberal but ironbound. Once a European is discharged from a job it is hard to get another. In Arthur's case he found it next to impossible. He was received with chilly politeness where he had been more than welcome, his friends dropped away from him, he and Joan were no longer invited out.

At first he was angry, then he grew resentful. He smarted under his wrongs and the cruel injustice to Joan. As if she were to blame! Damned vermin!

By the time they had been obliged to move out of their bungalow and into a shabby hotel he had grown gloomy, vindictive: he cursed the tropics and said they had betrayed him. In an effort to forget the injury he had

done his wife and to drug himself into an easier frame of mind he began to drink.

Joan watched the change in her husband with the same terror she would have watched the creeping advance of some slow disease and her every effort to check it failed. More than once she urged that they return home and offered to sell her few valuables—there were still enough left to cover passage on a cheap boat—but the man refused. The country had robbed him, he proposed to make it pay. Plainly the insidious poison of the East had thinned and soured his blood: his wife feared that it would wholly destroy him.

He returned home one evening with his breath smelling strongly of liquor: there was a smouldering rage in his eyes as he announced:

"Well, I've landed a job at last. I'm a warehouse clerk in Roeter's godown." When Joan stared at him uncomprehendingly he explained, "Any half caste could hold it, but I couldn't refuse. We'd have been thrown out of this filthy hotel before long."

"It's better than nothing, old boy," Joan managed to say, "and it will lead to something more substantial." She maintained an air of cheerfulness during the evening but in the black hours of the night she wept. Three months ago they had been people of consequence, they had lived in their own home, now they were ostracised and Arthur was taking a paltry position. Even more appalling than this come-down was the alteration in the man himself.

Life soon became a nightmare to the young wife for instead of bucking up Arthur brooded and drank the more. He hated his position and he reviled his employers: Joan realized that he was indeed mentally ill.

Of necessity he had resigned from his clubs, hence they had no social contacts whatever. In fact, it was only by the exercise of the strictest economy that they managed to live at all, and Joan grew shabbier constantly. Nevertheless she made no complaint.

One day, after several months had dragged by, Arthur announced sullenly that he had lost his position and in answer to his wife's words of sympathy he broke out,

"Oh, it was coming to me! I took chances and—got caught."

"Took chances?"

"I sold a bit of stuff now and then——"

"*Arthur!*"

"Why not? I had to make ends meet. The swine didn't pay me enough to live on. . . . Everybody's on the make out here. Look what that broker did to me! I've learned the whole thing was crooked: they made a false market and unloaded their own shares on their friends. Yes, and Burkett's as bad as the rest. Fired me after I'd worked myself dizzy for him."

"But—we can't go on this way——"

"I tell you I'll get even, one way or another."

"Not by stealing, surely."

"For God's sake, don't lecture." Arthur seized his *topi* and strode out of the room, leaving his wife crushed.

Joan was thoroughly terrified now. Arthur a thief! . . . And yet there was a certain courage about that confession for he could have hidden the truth from her easily enough. Or was it courage? Perhaps it was defiance. Perhaps he had grown wholly indifferent to her. But she could not believe the latter: it seemed more likely that he had collapsed under his load of bitter humiliation. Whatever the truth, the future now was dark indeed and she faced it with dread.

That affair at Roeter's turned out to be only the first of several similar "misfortunes," as Arthur termed them. He and Joan left Singapore finally and drifted to Malacca, then on to Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang. Crenshaw worked at one thing and another, he tallied cargo, he was a clerk at a tin mine, he recruited labor in *kampongs* but sooner or later he was always fired, and Joan suspected why.

Husband and wife had fallen steadily in the social scale, of course. The time came when they were considered a menace to the white man's prestige. This was death to Joan but when she mentioned leaving the East Arthur flew into a rage and refused to budge.

"Naturally it makes them sore to have me kicking about," he would say. "That's why I hang on. Run me out? Never!"

Not many women would have stuck to a man under these circumstances but Joan was not the quitting kind. What is more, she still loved her husband and believed in him. He was a sick man, she told herself, a worm

had eaten into his brain: if ever he had need of her it was now. Yes, and she was altogether to blame for his break down.

Three years of anguished watching and waiting wore around, at the end of which time Arthur could pick up nothing more than an occasional odd job: he and Joan found themselves living in the half-caste quarter of Penang.

It was there that their fortunes turned: there that Said Abdul Buraala came into their lives again.

Joan recognized him as he stepped out of a gharry and swung open their tumbledown gate.

"Mrs. Crenshaw," he began, "I am delighted that you remember me. I have had a long search for you."

Color mounted to Joan's forehead. She was acutely conscious of her appearance and the story it told: she could only murmur a polite greeting.

"You are embarrassed," he said gravely, "but so am I. I understand everything: there's nothing to be said. Please sit down." After a pause he continued speaking, "It may seem an impertinence for me to intrude, but you were once kind to me. A friend is one soul with two bodies. May I not be of assistance to you and your husband?"

"Why—thanks. You're very kind but—Arthur went out after tiffin and I don't expect him——"

"So much the better. We can speak with less constraint. I was in Singapore recently and I tried to look you up, hoping to see you and Mr. Crenshaw—at your

convenience, of course. I made inquiries and I heard a story that made my heart swim in tears. Was it true? . . . You may tell me, for the bosoms of the wise are the tombs of secrets."

Joan answered in a low voice, "Every word was true, Mr. Buraala. But—they treated Arthur abominably. We've gone down steadily, we're at the bottom of the pit."

"For your sake, I wish I had learned of it sooner. A day of sorrow is longer than a month of joy."

"Arthur has changed dreadfully. He's sick—sick, but he'd never accept charity."

"Nor would I offer charity," the Said declared. "Mrs. Crenshaw, a diamond with a flaw is preferable to a common stone without imperfection, and there are customers for all sorts of goods. I can use your husband. I have large interests. At this moment I need a manager for one of my pearling fleets. He would have to live on the water much of the time but you would have a bungalow in Dobo. It is not a nice place but I guarantee your safety. The salary would be liberal. In a few years it would lead to independence."

Joan stared at the speaker, silent, dazzled, breathless.

"I—can't believe you mean it," she gasped faintly. "Why should you be so generous?"

"I never ignore an injury, neither do I forget a favor. You gave me bread when I was starving. Don't decide for your husband. I will return this evening and talk to him."

Not until he had gone did Joan realize that she had failed miserably in expressing her gratitude.

When he met Arthur that evening Buraala must have been struck by the sad deterioration in the white man, but he gave no sign. Cordially and courteously he renewed his offer and when it was accepted, not without a suggestion of sullenness, he voiced his pleasure and outlined Arthur's duties. They were not arduous. In addition to handling the boats and crews in his charge Crenshaw would be expected to personally open the shells and extract the pearls, a task which could not be left to natives or to underlings. The responsibility was considerable but the pay was proportionate. Buraala was leaving at once for Dobo and would meet Arthur and Joan there when they arrived. Meanwhile his agents would arrange their passage and advance whatever money was needed.

"Do yourselves well," he urged them. "Have a good time for the next few days. *Chelaka!* One does not remain young forever and beauty passes." With an admiring glance at Joan he bowed and went out into the sultry night.

It was a moment before Arthur spoke, then he said gratingly, "Well, I've hit bottom at last. Hired by a colored man!" In answer to Joan's protest he cried angrily, "He isn't doing this for me. It's for you."

"Really, dear, what's the dif—?"

"You're a white woman. A beautiful white woman."

"Arthur!"

"I know the breed. Friendship! Gratitude! My eye!"

"Oh-h, but you're—*rotten!*" Joan cried. She went to the window and stared blindly out into the darkness. "If you feel that way we won't go."

"Indeed we will. We can't help ourselves."

More calmly the wife said, "Mr. Buraala is the first person, white or 'colored' who has offered us a helping hand. And he knows your record, Arthur, every chapter of it. Whether we go or whether we stay this is the turning point. You've got to start over again and start clean." When he mumbled something she went on, "We'd be mad to turn this down, but—I won't stir until you promise to pull yourself together. For God's sake, promise. We're drowning, don't you understand? And the Said has flung us a plank."

The husband took his head in his hands. "I *am* rotten," he admitted hoarsely. "But you're so lovely, Joan. That's what made a beast of me in the first place. Other and better men looking at you, wanting you. I'd rob, steal, murder, to keep you. And when I think what I've done to you—" He choked, his shoulders heaved. "I'm a filthy specimen, no mistake. But I promise. . . . Anything to see you safe and comfortable, with good clothes and a decent home once more. . . . All the same, I can't forget who Buraala is. He's a potentate. He has money, power, wives, concubines. Dobo's pretty fierce, from what I hear——"

"It can't be worse than some of the places we've been."

"Very well. It's settled. I'll see his agents in the morning."

On a blazing hot afternoon the Dutch steamer dropped anchor off an uninviting huddle of wooden stores and dwellings, apart from which stood some half dozen bleached bungalows fronted by a strip of sandy beach. It was Dobo. The village had been hewn out of the jungle, each end of the shore terminated in a tangle of snaky mangroves and coconut palms which grew down to and overhung the sea as if crowded thither by the congestion behind. That jungle was a wet and steaming place of perpetual shade.

A motor launch came weaving through the maze of *prahus* and up to the steamer's side: Buraala climbed the companionway to welcome the Crenshaws. Soon they were ashore and he was showing them through their home. It was tastefully furnished and immaculately clean. Joan was entranced.

The Said, as the young people knew, lived in great style at Amboyna but during the pearl fishing season he occupied a bungalow here and thither they went that night for dinner. As a mere temporary quarters it surprised them for it was large and it was filled with Oriental treasures—strange pieces of delicately wrought furniture, old silver, jade and tapestries. There were twice the ordinary number of servants.

Buraala himself welcomed his guests in the dress of his country, and Joan's eyes widened at sight of him.

He wore a magnificent silk *sarong* of red and green, black patent leather *spatus* and a white *baju* of finest linen. He had presented a commanding picture in European dress but in his native attire he was regal, overpowering.

Dinner, preceded by the inevitable gin *pahits* of the Dutch East Indies, consisted of an amazing turtle soup, dugong steaks, roasted New Guinea pigeons, strange tropical fruits and vegetables and tiny multi-colored cakes. The courses were accompanied by appropriate vintage wines. Coffee and Napoleon brandy topped off the feast.

Buraala proved himself to be a gracious and an impeccable host. There was no mention of business: the evening was spent in renewing that acquaintance so agreeably begun on shipboard, in discussing the treasures of his home, living conditions here at Dobo and kindred subjects. The Said addressed himself more to Joan than to her husband, and an occasional smile, a flash of his eyes, betrayed his interest and his appreciation of her wit, her intelligence or her common sense. He seemed to be exploring her, drawing her out, weighing her, and the task pleased him. As for her, she appeared to better advantage than for a long while, inasmuch as the final week in Penang had been devoted to shopping and she once more had the comfortable assurance that she was well groomed and able to appear at her best.

Crenshaw entered into his new work with a zest that filled his wife with optimism. True, Dobo was a miser-

able place, the climate was horrid, the surroundings were wild, and the people were wilder, but the spell of Buraala's name was magic and under his protection she felt secure.

It was a trial to have Arthur gone for weeks at a time but there was no help for it and she pretended to be overjoyed at their happy situation. As time went on she devised means of occupying her time. She fished, she collected orchids, she went on exploring trips with her head house boy. Being the only white woman on the island she had little companionship, to be sure, even though the Said arranged for her to visit the women of his harem, but on the whole she managed well enough.

Buraala was absent from Dobo considerably, nevertheless the magic of his name was potent, it covered her like a prophet's mantle, and she realized that the women of his household were no safer than she. Under the circumstances, it gave her a very comfortable feeling.

His courtesy, his deference, had not lessened but he no longer analyzed her; it seemed that he had measured her and was satisfied. As for Arthur he put his own construction upon the Said's behaviour and when Joan referred to her occasional visits to the harem he listened silently, cursing himself the while for having walked into this trap with open eyes. While away with the pearling fleet he brooded much, and during his visits to port he saw less and less of his wife. There was much to be done, he explained, and he was working hard to make a good showing.

As the season drew to a close he confessed that the jinx was still on him in that the shells found by his divers had yielded very few pearls—pretty poor ones at that. It was a pity.

Joan believed him at first, then suspicions, of which she was ashamed, took form in her mind. Was he lying? Had the worm bored too deeply? She refused actually to voice these questions but her intuitions were keen and certainly there was something wrong with Arthur. What else could it be?

The very effort to answer made her miserable.

If indeed he was so mad as to play the Said false there could be but one outcome. Buraala was kindly but merciless. He had paid his debt, betrayal by the beggar whom he had stooped to lift would, in his eyes, call for vengeance swift and terrible, and rightly so. Arthur would merit any punishment. But what would happen to her if the crash came? Buraala's word was law: he held the power almost of life and death here. A white woman alone and penniless in this Mohammedan hell. Joan grew faint at the contemplation.

Buraala stopped her one day at the entrance of her compound and said, "You are worried, Mrs. Crenshaw. What is troubling you?"

The woman felt her lips whiten as she denied the charge: her heart sank at the curious smile that flickered over the Said's face.

"Do not permit yourself to be disturbed," he told her

quietly. "A bird can roost on but one branch. A mouse can drink no more than its fill from a river."

"I—don't know what that means."

"Never mind. I, too, have worried, for it is easier to know how to do a thing than to do it, but—we Malays have a saying that if one ferries at all it is best to ferry right over. Be assured of one thing, your happiness is very dear to me."

With quaking knees Joan made her way up to the bungalow and sank into a porch chair. For a long while she remained motionless, her shoulders drooping, her straining fingers clasped between her knees, her eyes staring blindly out into the blazing tropic noon.

Then it was true! Poor Arthur! Poor sick, mad creature! She wondered if he would listen to her warning: if there was time to make restitution. Well, when the blow fell she could probably buy his freedom. And why not, since this was her fault?

The monsoon began to blow a few days later and the pearly boats came pelting home. Arthur's schooner anchored late and he went straight to the office to pay off his divers and coolies. It was dark when he left for his bungalow.

On his way a Malay in European whites stepped out of a shadow and spoke furtively, "Tuan! May I have a moment?"

The fellow was a stranger, and Arthur inquired gruffly: "What do you want?"

"It is something most private. I room at Nastasia's house. We could talk there."

Crenshaw was instantly on guard. "If you have business, blurt it out."

"Tuan! I beg of you——"

"Oh, go to the devil!"

The Malay stepped closer. "I am a dealer in pearls. I buy from anyone. I ask no questions."

"Indeed?" A cold sweat broke out upon the white man. "You've got a nerve to tell *me* that."

"You have pearls——"

"The hell I have!"

"Do not pretend anger, tuan. I know what I know. I do not call it a crime to rob those who rob others. Big fish eat little ones, the little ones eat shrimps and the shrimps are forced to eat mud. Is it not better to sell to me at a fair price than to have the Controleur search your house? The rich are avaricious, they are vindictive. But who can trace guilders?"

Arthur felt an impulse to strangle the scoundrel, on the other hand if he refused to do business with the man—then what? One buyer was about like another. "How much money have you got?" he inquired finally.

"Oh, plenty, tuan!" The Malay patted his breast pocket significantly.

"Very well. Come along."

There was an unused storehouse at the back of the Crenshaw compound; thither the owner led his visitor. Once inside he switched on his pocket flashlight. Reach-

ing inside his shirt he unbuckled a belt from his waist and drew it forth. From one of the pockets he removed three small cotton wool packages which he opened one by one. At sight of what lay inside the Malay massaged his hands and made strange clucking noises with his lips.

It was a half hour later when the two emerged from the storeroom and silently separated.

While the Crenshaws were still at their coffee a messenger arrived. He salaamed, he presented the respects and the apologies of Said Abdul Buraala, who begged that the memsahib would come with the utmost speed. There was trouble in his home. His youngest wife was ill and frightened and calling for her.

"Of course I'll come," Joan promised. To Arthur she explained, "She's only a child and—it's her first baby."

"I'll go along, too," the husband said, "but frankly, I don't like the idea of your—visiting that harem."

"No time to think about that. Let's hurry." Together the two set out for the big bungalow.

The Said was profuse in his thanks to Joan, he turned her over to the wrinkled old eunuch whom she had often seen and said, "You have a heart of gold. Again you put me in your debt, Mrs. Crenshaw."

When she had left the room he turned to Arthur saying, "What a treasure you have in that benevolent woman. She is as beautiful in soul as she is in face and in body."

"Yes—she's all right," Arthur murmured.

"One can demand but four things from a woman: that

virtue dwell in her heart, modesty adorn her forehead, sweetness flow from her lips and industry occupy her hands. I have taken occasion to study your wife carefully— But let me mix you a whiskey and *ayer blanda*. I have a matter to discuss with you.” Returning from the silver tray on a side table Buraala handed Arthur his drink, then seated himself at his desk. “The matter is—this.” Uncovering a lacquered box he took from it three small cotton wool packages at sight of which Crenshaw’s eyes dilated. Slowly the Said opened the packages and arranged them in a row before him. In the heart of each there was a nest of pearls and some were of extraordinary size and fineness.

Crenshaw sat like a man transfixed, tiny ripples disturbed the liquid in his glass: the silence was unbroken except by a stridulous squeak from a house lizard.

“What have you there?” Arthur managed to set down his drink without spilling it.

“Just some of my pearls. Will you kindly hand over the money you received for them?”

“What the devil—?” the white man exploded.

“A fool admires himself most when he has committed some folly. The money is counterfeit and I obtained it for this occasion from my friend the Chief of Police of Amboyna. It was formerly the property of a half-caste gambler.”

Somewhere a dog barked. From the women’s quarters came the sound of a stringed instrument and a native love song.

"How could you hope to hide your footsteps when you walked in snow?" the Said inquired. "That pearl buyer is a distant cousin of mine, likewise imported for the occasion. . . . You are an incredibly foolish man to put yourself so utterly in the hands of a—stranger, an alien."

A change had come over Crenshaw, his eyes were blazing, his mouth was twisted. Hoarsely he cried:

"Is your wife really sick? Or was that just a trap to get—Mrs. Crenshaw here?"

Buraala stared at him curiously. "What do you surmise?"

"I think it was a lie, a part of this—this filthy trickery."

"Correct! . . . Trickery, yes? We have a saying that he who leads an ox to drink must wet his own feet——"

On the Mohammedan's desk lay a slender *kris* used by him as a letter opener. Arthur suddenly made a move towards it but the Said swept it up, dropped it into a drawer.

"Hm-m! Realization of Mrs. Crenshaw's—danger stirs you to action." Buraala nodded. "That is creditable, and you have very little to your credit. What a pity you did not think of her sooner."

Arthur was shaking palsiedly, there was frenzy in his eyes. The speaker went on, "I have studied you both: I think I understand you as thoroughly as I do her."

"You can't get away with this," Crenshaw chattered. "I don't care what you do to *me* but——"

"Permit me to read your thoughts and correct me if I

am wrong. Shame at your deed is forgotten. You have no regrets. You are thinking only that your lovely wife is now the prey of a wily Oriental and that you delivered her to him, bound hand and foot."

Crenshaw cursed, he rolled his head from side to side.

"My attentions to her have meant but one thing—Oh, you are transparent, and I know the white mind! I am not of your faith therefore I am a barbarian. My motives are evil. My religion is a sham—Be silent until I have finished! . . . Crenshaw, your life is in my hands —"

"To hell with that!"

Sternly the Said went on. "I am the head of my people here. I am the law: the high justice and the low. My enemies wither——"

"I'll take my medicine but—it's not her fault I went bad. I'd do worse than steal for her."

"No doubt. And she would sacrifice herself, body and soul, to save you. . . . Oh, miserable man! Have I aroused you, or are you at heart wholly rotten?"

Arthur managed to control himself: he stared inquiringly at the speaker.

"To persecute the unfortunate is like throwing stones on one fallen into a well," the Said resumed. "I hired you with my eyes open: I knew your whole history and I had little faith in your honesty but I reasoned that it is not the defect of the branches nor the leaves that cause a tree to perish, it is the decay of the root. This man is not bad at the core, I told myself, or that brave, gentle

woman would not cling to him so steadfastly. I warned you when we first met that the East puts an evil spell upon white men. You lack our moral fibre, perhaps. I said, 'Crenshaw has become a rogue elephant.' . . . You have heard of our rogue elephants? Sometimes one is cast out of the herd and becomes solitary, he broods and anger frets him until he destroys for the joy of destruction. To trample and wreck and kill salves his injured feelings.

"Strange to say, if these rogues are caught and tamed they turn out to be the best animals. Men can be like that.

"Crenshaw, you and your wife did me a kindness when I lay sick and despised among strangers. You put a fetter upon my neck. *You* are sick. You are a rogue and I have tried to tame you. Have I succeeded?"

"Do you mean to say you—you'll give me another chance?" Arthur spoke from a daze.

"More than that. I invite you to start again. I could not do less for, regardless of what you have done or may do to me, you have honored my name and you and she are guests in the house of my fathers. It is written."

"Oh, my God!" Crenshaw leaned forward in his chair, he took his face in his hands, his shoulders heaved.

Outside, the palms rustled faintly. Someone on a fishing *prahu* hailed the shore and in the silence came the voice of Joan. She was approaching. She was chatting with the old eunuch and he was giggling joyously.

Arthur rose and went to a window where the light was dim.

"Well, everything is all right, Mr. Buraala. She's feeling much better," Joan announced.

"You bear healing to the sick and the unfortunate," Buraala told her. "My gratitude is deep. While you were gone Arthur and I laid out our plans for next season."

"Next—season?" Joan shot a startled glance at her husband and for the first time in months he met her gaze frankly. In his face she read a message that caused her heart to leap. Poor Arthur! How she had wronged him!

In a voice low but steady he told her: "Things went rather badly with me this season but Mr. Buraala understands and—they'll go better from now on."

"I'm—so glad——"

"Yes, we understand each other fully." The Said nodded and beamed upon the couple. "Now away with thoughts of pain and pearls and profits. Sit down and let's talk about books and pictures and friendship and—well, about shoes and ships and sealing-wax and cabbages and kings."

GEOFFREY CARLETON



TIGER SNAKE

VII

Tiger Snake

GEOFFREY married! Well, I'll be boiled!" Philip Winsby ran a brown hand over his crisp light hair, now bleached in rusty streaks by the tropic sun. "Bringing his wife out here! Good Lord! The man is crazy!" He spoke aloud and then held the letter closer to the kerosene lamp.

I, myself, would have felt just about as Winsby did had I been in his shoes. To begin with, Geoffrey Carleton was the most confirmed of confirmed bachelors, and secondly, his plantation was one of the last places in the world you'd bring a woman to; that is, a woman you thought enough of to marry. It must have seemed incredible to Winsby.

But there it was, set down in Geoffrey's minute handwriting. He and his wife would arrive by the next steamer, a month later. Would Philip have the bungalow made ship-shape: walls painted, new matting put down, and the like. He knew Philip wouldn't mind moving his kit into the assistant's bungalow. . . . "Sorry to lose you, old thing, but you understand. Much as I dislike doing it I'll have to claim Mara for my own house boy. He is quiet and experienced and understanding and

inasmuch as Evelyn knows nothing about housekeeping out there she can't very well get along without him. You can easily break in another boy for yourself. . . . Please send Ali to Dobo with the launch to meet the Van Baalen and above all things see that Mineh packs up and gets out immediately. Give her some money—be liberal—and send her back to her mother. She mustn't be hanging about the place when I get back. No need to impress upon you the importance of this."

There followed certain instructions concerning the tapping of young rubber trees, details of a proposed addition to the latex shed and the name of the new London agents to whom the copra was to be consigned.

Philip leaned back in his chair and gazed into space. Geoffrey Carleton married. That was almost funny. And a trifle tragic, too—for the girl, whoever she was. Geoffrey was forty-five, twenty years the senior of his assistant, and the most notorious philanderer in the Islands. On his way out from home to take this job, Philip had heard him referred to as the worst woman hunter in the Federated Malay States, and from some planters he had learned that his chief had chucked up a job in Ipoh and had left Kuala Lumpur between dark and dawn—between son and son, in a manner of speaking—as a result of certain amorous entanglements. Later, he had been driven from Singapore by an irate husband with a sixshooter. Then, too, there was Mineh, Geoffrey's housekeeper. Even during Philip's time here on Bukit Satu, there had been other Minehs, other

"housekeepers." Certainly Geoffrey had never curbed his inclinations in the least: Philip wondered if Mrs. Carleton by any chance suspected how thoroughly shop-worn her husband was. He assumed she did not, but—it was no business of his. He liked Geoffrey pretty well and they had rubbed along satisfactorily these two years. . . . Married! Well, the fellow was infernally good looking in his lean, dark, intense way, and women liked masterful men. They didn't seem to much mind their pre-nuptial histories, either. No doubt they derived a satisfactory pride in plucking brands from the burning.

But whatever might be said about Carleton's reputation as a ladies' man, there was no denying his ability as a planter and he had nerve, too. It took nerve to combat a horror of snakes such as his in a place like Bukit Satu. Philip, himself, had the average man's aversion to serpents but Geoffrey's fear of them was abnormal: it amounted to a fixation. It was more than fear: the mere sight of one, no matter how small or how harmless, threw him into a painful condition midway between paralysis and hysteria: even the picture of a snake provoked a strange physical rigor, a mental numbness, and one of Philip's first duties, upon his arrival, had been to go through all the books in the bungalow and pin together the pages upon which were snake pictures of any and every sort. If by chance Geoffrey encountered such a picture, he would stare at it in fascination, unable to turn the page or to drop the book; he would hold it, gasping and shuddering, until somebody took it out of

his hands and then he would suffer a complete collapse. To hew a plantation out of an East Indies jungle infested with every sort of crawling thing required something more than ordinary physical courage on the part of a man accursed with a pre-natal fear of this sort but that is precisely what Geoffrey had done.

And now he was bringing his wife out to live on the place! That took something like courage. Or was Geoffrey wholly selfish and indifferent to his bride's happiness? . . . Bukit Satu was on Penambuli, one of the Aru Islands just west of New Guinea, and while it was all very well for a man, it was a ghastly spot for any civilized woman. There were few whites on the Arus, their European population consisted of two Dutch officials and a handful of pearl shellers who lived either on their schooners or in Dobo where the steamer called once a month. And Dobo was a half day's journey by launch. A woman on Penambuli! She'd go off her bean in six months. It was inhuman of Geoffrey to fetch her.

The tall glass in the circular receptacle in the arm of Philip's rattan chair was empty so he called,

"Boy!"

"Tuan!" came the prompt reply in a deep voice and a house boy padded softly into the room. He was clad in a red and blue sarong and an immaculate white coat.

"Whiskey-soda, Mara."

"*Saya, tuan.*" The glass was taken and Mara disappeared. When he returned Philip said:

"I have a letter from the *tuan besar* and it has big news. He is married."

"So?"

"He's bringing his wife out next month. We're going to have a white woman here on Bukit Satu and you'll have to wait on her. I'm going to lose you, Mara."

The boy listened with his customary inscrutable expression: he bowed and said:

"It is as Tuan Allah wills."

"I don't mind saying I'll miss you, Mara. You're a perfect servant and I'll never get another like you."

"I do my work," the Malay agreed simply.

"You'll probably have double the duties when she comes. But this is a lonesome place for a white woman, you must make things as easy and pleasant for her as possible. I'm sure you'll do that, eh?" Again the native bowed. "And another thing, I'm going to ask you to break in a new boy for me."

There followed some discussion as to candidates for the position which ended, quite naturally, by Philip putting the selection entirely up to Mara, then the latter retired noiselessly to the rear of the bungalow and resumed his work of inlaying with brass the grotesque pattern which he had carved upon the handle of a murderous-looking *kris*.

A perfect "boy," Philip told himself again with some regret: he hated the thought of losing him. To be exact, Mara was not a boy, for he was well past forty, nor was his name Mara, which means angry. That appellation

had been applied to him because of his equable temper and unbelievable placidity, this inversion of nomenclature being a popular form of Malay humor. As another example of it, the one-legged storekeeper was known as Kaki Saribu, centipede.

Mara's lack of emotion was a source of constant amusement to the more excitable coolies and his philosophical habit of accepting either calamity or good fortune with a raising of the shoulders and a respectful tribute to his deity invariably provoked laughter. When he gambled and won heavily or lost his last *kipping*, he expressed neither joy nor regret—it was Allah's doing; when a razor-sharp *parang* with which he was splitting wood glanced from a knot and neatly severed his left little finger he merely eyed the stump and said a little wistfully:

"It is as Tuan Allah wills!"

This very imperturbability, coupled with an uncanny efficiency in whatever he undertook, made him an exceptional servant. If a dozen pearl shellers came ashore without warning half an hour before dinner he would conjure, by some magic of his own, an excellent meal for all. He was never fussed, never bothered. When Geoffrey and Philip were too busy to shoot meat, he would disappear into the jungle and return with a wild boar or a deer. He was an excellent barber, he could mend and launder clothes expertly, he could cook, wait on the table, mix cocktails or lead you to the haunts of birds of

paradise. He was on call at any hour of the day or night—he seemed never to sleep—and best of all he knew how to anticipate wants. Mara it was who made life at Bukit Satu bearable.

It was late that night before Philip fell asleep. The mosquito netting over his bed shut out the air, the sheet underneath him felt as hot as an ironing board, and the perspiration from his hair soaked his pillow slip. Just outside his room a night bird was calling in a maddening monotony, frogs gurgled among the mangroves and the mournful sound of a native stringed instrument came from the coolie lines. The sea was placid, it barely whispered against the shore.

Geoffrey and his wife would soon be on that sea, bound thither. Her name was Evelyn. A pretty name: and knowing Geoffrey as he did Philip assumed that she was pretty, too. But would she be happy in this God forsaken place? Happy! Would she even find contentment here? The assistant manager doubted it, not so much because of Bukit Satu as because of Geoffrey Carleton, himself. Carleton had never been constant to any woman, he tired quickly of his conquests, he was a philanderer at heart. Can such a man change his nature any more than a leopard its spots? Philip pondered the question. Love works miracles, of course, but— It must be wonderful to love, and to be loved. . . . Evelyn! A sweet, simple name. . . . Some sweet, simple country girl, no doubt. . . . Philip slept.

The days sped swiftly. Geoffrey's bungalow was thoroughly cleaned and renovated at last and Philip moved into his own smaller quarters. Mara had painted the other place, he had scrubbed and swept and dusted it, he had made new white curtains and bright cushion covers for the memsahib's coming. He would have looped up the curtains with enormous bows of blood red ribbons but had regretfully abandoned that project when Philip demurred.

Little Mineh had been disposed of, too. She had not been able to see that Geoffrey's marriage concerned her in the least but when Philip had insisted that it did and that it meant her immediate banishment she had lowered her limpid brown eyes and archly suggested that she was willing to keep house for him. She was only eighteen: anybody would tell him that she was the prettiest girl on the Islands. Did she not possess a neat figure, perfect features, tiny hands and feet? Philip had admitted that she was wholly charming but had asserted that he was not in need of a woman in his house. Mineh wept. She brightened, however, at the sight of a fifty guilder note and finally departed in the launch for Dobo, sitting in stiff dignity upon the camphor-wood box which contained her sarongs, her hair ornaments and the other finery which Geoffrey had provided. So much for that.

Mara kept quietly but unremittingly busy around the bungalow up to the evening before the expected arrival of the bride and groom, and early the next morning he shot a dugong, the meat of which he knew was pleasing

to the *tuan besar*. He likewise shot some pigeons for the memsahib in case she should not like the taste of dugong. Every piece of furniture had been rubbed down, Geoffrey's pipes were cleaned, polished and laid out on a brass tray, the bungalow was gay with orchids and with great bunches of flamboyant, every vase was crowded with blooms of bright red, pale green, mauve, pink, purple and yellow, for he knew that memsahibs love flowers.

When, some time after sundown, the whistle of the motor launch sounded, Mara appeared, fresh from his evening bath and dressed for the gala occasion in a handsome sarong of silver and blue, with cap and slippers of the same material and a short coat of snowy white. After a hurried visit to the cook-house—he invariably supervised every meal—he prepared cocktails.

"Hello there, Philip!" It was Geoffrey speaking. "This is Evelyn. Give her a hand up, will you? Evelyn, this is Phil Winsby." In the dusk the launch had nosed in to the dock, its propeller was churning the water into a myriad of phosphorescent bubbles, there was a noisy chattering among the coolies as they helped with the craft.

Philip heard himself speaking to the bride and realized when he lifted her to the pier that she was a tiny little thing, scarcely larger than a child, but in the uncertain light he could not well make out her features. They were delicate and regular—he saw that much—she had a nice voice and a nicer laugh, the grip of her hands was

warm and friendly. Then he and Geoffrey were greeting each other with British restraint, expressing in casual words their mutual pleasure at the homecoming.

On the way up to the bungalow, Geoffrey did most of the talking and Philip had no opportunity of appraising the newcomer further than to note with renewed surprise how tiny and how youthful she appeared.

Their entry into the large living room, comfortable with its rattan furniture, was Mara's cue to appear with a tray of superlative cocktails. He bowed and smiled with a dignity which instantly won Evelyn, and her enthusiastic appreciation of his efforts to beautify the place in her honor as promptly won his liking. Like a humming bird she skipped daintily from one bouquet to another, from orchid to orchid, and for the first time Philip had a chance to observe her closely. She was a revelation. Mechanically he drank to her health and happiness, he voiced the customary felicitations but with a strange feeling of dismay. She was much lovelier than he had expected, lovelier even than those delicately tinted blooms that so delighted her. This child the wife of Geoffrey Carleton! This fragrant creature the mistress of Bukit Satu! How incredible! How—tragic!

Dinner was a perfect meal and Mara served it with dexterity: the talk was of the Derby, Ascot, Henley, the voyage out and the plantation. Evelyn was no country girl. Not until the coffee and liqueurs arrived did it occur to Philip that he and the bride had hit it off instantly and that they had practically monopolized the

conversation while Geoffrey had done most of the drinking. Three or four whiskies with dinner, on top of as many cocktails, was rather stiff even for him and rather more than a homecoming called for. As a matter of fact, the husband seemed absent-minded, almost bored. Nor did he brighten up perceptibly during the evening.

As Philip lay awake in his own bungalow, deeply stirred, unaccountably excited by the incidents of the past few hours, he told himself it was rather rotten of Geoffrey to fling a wet blanket over his wife's first evening on the plantation. But probably he was tired. That was a long, dull trip on the Van Baalen. Evelyn, too, had seemed tired: there were faint crescents of weariness under her eyes. Lovely little bird-like creature: frank and clean and ingenuous. Surely she couldn't know her husband's history.

To Mara, the beautiful memsahib soon became a goddess. The moment she had entered that living room and smiled at him he had become her slave and as time went on his devotion grew until, with the exception of Evelyn's Malay maid, he would permit no one to do anything for her.

Evelyn entered into the life at Bukit Satu with an admirable zest. She did much to make both bungalows livable without interfering with their masculine comfort and in boots, khaki shirt and sun helmet she went shooting crocodiles or deer with Geoffrey and Philip. With them she fished for sharks, rock cod and pink parrot fish; not once did she complain of the heat, the leeches, the

mosquitoes nor the torrential rains. She was a good little sport and a charming companion.

Often she insisted upon taking Mara along on these trips, to his great delight. If the launch came close to an unsuspecting turtle, he would dive overboard, seize it expertly and hang on, guiding it to the surface and keeping it there until he and his prize could be picked up. He was skilled in all manner of tricks of this sort and did not the memsahib like turtle meat better than any other kind?

Despite Evelyn's buoyancy of spirits, however, Philip was not slow to realize that she was unhappy. Frequently there was a pained look in her eyes, a look of bewilderment and of fear, often she was unnaturally quiet and a plaintive, inquiring pucker fixed itself between her brows.

Geoffrey, too, had changed. He was no longer the genial pal Philip had known. Frequently he was bitter and morose, around the bungalow there was more than a hint of tension. Philip felt rather than saw these evidences of trouble and he suspected the cause, but neither husband nor wife mentioned them. Mara could have told him something for he had heard stifled sobs in the memsahib's room late at night when only the whispering palm leaves and the singing of insects broke the silence, but Mara never talked. Nor could anyone have divined the nature of the Malay's thoughts for his was a peculiarly oriental brain.

As time went on Geoffrey's disposition grew worse

rather than better and without apparent reason. He was irritable and abrupt, not alone with Evelyn but also with Philip and even with the coolies. This was utterly unlike him. He appeared to take a malevolent satisfaction out of making life unpleasant for everybody on the place, and more than once Philip and he came close to quarreling.

Evelyn's gaiety had given way to a pensive listlessness and she avoided Philip when she could do so without risk of hurting his feelings, a fact for which he was both sorry and glad. His mind was ceaselessly preoccupied with thoughts of her; when he beheld her wandering alone along the beach, a tragically lonely and pathetic figure, he had to fight down an almost irresistible impulse to run after her and—and take her in his arms. Yes, he was wild about her. No blinking the facts, he was a traitor to his chief, and he hated himself for his treachery.

Whatever the nature of Geoffrey's grievance against his bride, he was behaving like a swine. It was a damnable shame, the assistant told himself, and Geoffrey needed a good hiding. Evelyn was a prisoner here, this was her Devil's Island, and her brutish husband actually gloated over her misery.

Then, one day, Philip saw Mineh near the coolie lines and a gasp of amazement escaped him. . . . She could not have returned without Geoffrey's sanction. The man was out of his mind, he had cast off his last shred of decency and, row or no row, he was due to be called.

Philip found his chief finishing the inspection of some new fish traps down by the lagoon and together they walked back towards the house.

"I got a bit of a shock just now," Philip began. "I ran into Minch. Did you know she was here?"

A flush of annoyance rose to the older man's face.

"Naturally I knew, since I sent for her."

"Sent for her!"

"Exactly! What of it?"

"I—rather imagined you were through with that sort of thing now that——"

"Look here," Geoffrey controlled his anger with an effort. "Where do you come in to meddle with my affairs? I half expected you'd fire some bilge of this sort. D'you imagine I'll ever 'be through with that sort of thing,' as you put it?"

"Lord knows you should be."

"It shows how little you know. You could be happy with one woman. I can't. Now mind your own business, will you?"

"*All right!*" The assistant's voice shook with rage. "But first let me tell you that you're a dirty rotter."

"I've been called worse," Geoffrey said with a shrug. "Really, I'm not interested in your opinion of me."

"Hang it all!" Philip swallowed his resentment and sought to launch a frank talk that might lead to some good. "I—I don't understand you any more. You've entirely changed since you went on leave."

"Yes?"

"Evelyn is a wonderful woman, she's far too good for you. She's a game little sport and you brought her out here to this jumping-off place. Now—" the speaker's indignation rose again and choked him. "Well, your behaviour stinks to heaven."

"If the odor offends you——"

"It does."

"Then why don't you get a job that smells better?"

"D'you mean that?"

"It's up to you. I don't propose to be crossed. . . . Frankly, I'm not a one-woman man and there's no use pretending I am. As a matter of fact, if I were the usual jealous husband I'd have fired you long before this."

"Indeed?"

"Don't you think I've noticed how you feel towards Evelyn?"

"That's a—lie!" Philip exploded. "If that's how you look at me, to hell with you and your job. I'm off today."

"Oh, no you're not! Your contract calls for three months' notice. You'll stay till I get a man to replace you."

"Very well! Three months it is. And be damned to you!" The younger man turned and strode away.

This scene had reached its climax as the two were crossing a patch of long lalang grass near the plantation boundary: heedless of the direction he took Philip made off through it. But he had not gone a hundred feet when he heard a choking cry behind him and whirled

about to behold Geoffrey frozen rigidly in his tracks, his eyes fixed in a horrified stare, one hand clutching his collar as if he were strangling. A rigor had seized him, his face was ghastly: all he could do was call feebly to his assistant in a dying voice.

Philip knew the meaning of this phenomenon and his fury died: it was succeeded by pity and by a swift apprehension for Geoffrey's safety. Involuntarily he shouted and charged back whence he had come. The rush of his approach frightened the serpent upon which Geoffrey's eyes had been hypnotically fixed: when he arrived at the stricken man only a rustling and a movement in the grass betrayed the direction the snake had taken.

Geoffrey came out of his spell as a man awakens from a hideous hypnotic spell, he shook, his muscles jerked, he seemed about to faint, sweat poured from him and his knees buckled.

"It was—coiled!" he stammered. "Another step and—I would have been on it. . . . Good God!"

"Pull yourself together, old man. No danger now."

"One of those infernal tiger snakes——"

"Tiger snake! We haven't seen one in months."

"Damned things attack when they're roused: tear a man like a dog." Geoffrey shuddered, and clung weakly to his assistant: he all but collapsed. "Lend me a hand, will you? Up to the house. Thanks! Rotten luck for a chap to have such a failing. . . . Out here, of all places! . . . Paralyzed! Can't move! Utterly helpless." He was trying to apologize for his behaviour but interspersed

his words with incoherent profanities which showed the terrible revolt he suffered. "I was born that way, and it makes no difference whether the damned things are venomous or not. Or how small they are. . . . My mother was the same. Had a scare when she was carrying me and—and passed it on. . . . I—I didn't think I'd make you hear. Voice leaves me: everything! I'm petrified. It's—worse than a physical fright. It's something abysmal: it goes down into my soul. Now—I'll be done up for days. Lord! I need a drink." With uncertain hand the speaker wiped the streaming sweat from his face.

He gabbled on hysterically while Philip helped him to the bungalow, then he collapsed into a chair and called for Mara.

"Tuan!" came the boy's deep voice: he appeared instantly.

"Whiskey, quickly," Philip directed. "The *tuan besar* nearly stepped on a tiger snake."

Mara disappeared and returned in a twinkling with glass and decanter. It was some time before Geoffrey allowed Philip to leave and then it was only after he had mumbled a half-hearted apology for his part in their recent quarrel.

"Try and forget it," he said. "We can manage to get along somehow."

Philip made no comment.

In the days that followed, the younger man ceased to drop in at the Carleton bungalow and only went there

when definitely asked. At such times he treated Evelyn with the most rigid formality for her husband's words rankled in his mind. It was true that he loved her, madly, passionately, hopelessly, and it did no good to deny it. He was impelled to flee the place but under the provisions of his contract he was chained there for another three months and while the situation was almost intolerable there seemed to be no escape from it.

Philip sat in his small mosquito-proof porch one night surrounded by a litter of ancient newspapers that had arrived from England by the last mail when he heard the screen door of the large bungalow slam. He looked up in time to see Evelyn flying down the path towards the beach. It was a moonlight night, there was no mistaking her figure as it flitted through the shadows. Strange! Why was she out at this hour? It was nearly midnight. And running!

Urged by some disquieting fear of he knew not what Philip rose and hastened after her. He breathed more easily when he found her crouched upon a fallen palm tree near the water's edge. At the sound of his voice she turned her head in his direction then stared out to sea again. Philip looked down at her with a feeling of boundless compassion, it was a moment before he could trust himself to inquire:

"Is—anything wrong, Evelyn?"

She raised her head, their eyes met. "Everything's wrong," she said.

"I'm so sorry. Can I—help?"

"Thanks, old boy. There's nothing anybody can do. It's all my fault for—" She stopped suddenly with a catch in her voice.

"For what?"

"For marrying him in the face of—of everything. My people warned me but I wouldn't believe them."

There was a silence; overhead the feathery palms whispered, there was a soft hissing as tiny wavelets ran up the hard sand and drained away. Among the gnarled black mangrove roots an army of land crabs was stirring.

"Geoffrey's a mystery to me," Philip confessed at last. "I can't understand him these last few months."

"I understand him. He's bored."

"Bored?"

"Maddeningly. Insufferably. He's that sort. He couldn't love one woman—not more than a week or two, anyhow. Possession! Satiation! Boredom! That's the course he runs. . . . Rather humiliating to a wife, isn't it?" Evelyn's lips twisted in a brave effort at a smile. "He's not to blame for it, I suppose, any more than for his terror of snakes. It's a part of his make-up."

"Does he know you left the house?" Philip inquired.

The wife shook her head and her bright hair gleamed in the moonlight. "He's asleep by now, drunk as usual. He was beastly. Said things that—drove me out. I'm about ready to chuck it."

Evelyn's meaning was plain and Philip protested gruffly: "Don't talk like that."

"You see I was utterly inexperienced," the woman resumed after a while. "It may do me some good to tell you how it all came about. . . . I met him when he was on leave the time before last and we ran around together: golf, tennis, theatres and night clubs. Father is hard up and it was a great treat for me. When he came home this time we took things up where we'd left off. I was flattered at the attentions of a man like Geoffrey. He proposed one night after we'd been punting on the river. A night like this. Father was a bit upset, I thought, when I told him: spoke about Geoffrey's age, the life out here and all that. I assumed he'd be relieved to be rid of me, with three other daughters coming on and I told him so. Poor old pater has only a few hundred a year and a bit of a pension and it's hard to make ends meet. Why, he went teetotal: he gave up cigars and his clubs to balance the family budget. No car, nothing. Golf balls were an extravagance. . . . But he wasn't relieved. He told me finally that he'd had a report on Geoffrey from an old friend who used to be a planter in the Federated Malay States and—it was awful. Affairs with women and scandals by the hatful: he'd kept mum about it hoping Geoffrey wouldn't propose or if he did that I'd refuse him. . . . We had the usual row; in fact, the whole family came down about my ears in a swarm. There's no use of going into all that. I taxed Geoffrey and he pleaded guilty, he held me in his arms and promised it would never happen again, he'd never look at another

woman. I was all he wanted, he begged me to marry him at once and end the battle at home.

"What could I do? What would any girl do? . . . Pater took it the best of any, gave us champagne after the wedding and treated Geoffrey like a prince. The rest of the family refused to join in, they went off to the golf links."

"How perfectly filthy!" Philip broke out.

"Pretty poisonous, I thought. Dad finally slipped me a fifty-pound note, which I knew he couldn't afford, and stood out in the road waving farewell to us, poor old dear!

"You can imagine I had regrets. But Geoffrey was wonderful—for a while: he made up for everything and I adored him. . . . Then it began. I refused to see it at first. I pretended to favor his attentions to other women. But—something happened on the way out. There was a married woman on shipboard, rather pretty but as common as dirt. . . . I thought I'd die. Geoffrey and I had a scene, the first of many, and he told me that I wasn't his jailer: he'd spend his time in his own way. He ordered me to mind my own business. . . . I was horrified, stunned." Evelyn passed a hand over her shining hair in a harrowed gesture. "He began drinking, after that clash, which made it worse: he was saturated every night. Oh, it was horrible!

"You know how things have gone on here. Everything was smashed before we arrived and now—Mineh!

. . . I can take a wallop without crying but—" The speaker's voice died away in a hopeless sigh.

"You can divorce him," Philip declared savagely.

"How? By naming Mineh? In a court thousands of miles away? Where is my proof?"

"At least you can go back to your people."

"I'd rather be burned alive after the way they behaved! And besides, I couldn't come down on father's allowance. One has to be fair to the rest of the brood, you know. . . . Tonight Geoffrey told me that you were leaving, and why."

"'Why'?" Philip echoed.

"Yes. He said you loved me."

"The—unspeakable swine!"

"He accused me of loving you, too." When her listener exploded incoherently Evelyn gestured listlessly. "What of it? It's true."

"Evelyn!" gasped the man.

"Oh, yes! I've known how you felt for a long time and of course Geoffrey read me. He's no fool. . . . It wasn't an accusation exactly, he rather enjoys the situation, in some perverted way. This solitude, or something, has made a devil out of him: his love for me, if he ever had any, has turned to hate. Men hate their jailers, you know."

"By heaven, this can't go on!" Philip cried passionately. "I'll take you away. I'll——"

"Don't be silly, dear. There are some things that just can't be done."

"There's one too many of us on Bukit Satu," the man cried sullenly.

"And I'm the one. Not you; not Geoffrey. That's why I was staring at the water when you came. But—it takes nerve. . . . You and he were friends until I came: I spoiled it as I spoiled my own life. Oh, my dear, why wasn't it you who came home on leave instead of——?"

Evelyn's wail of protest was interrupted by a voice which issued from the inky shadows of the coconut palms, and Mara materialized.

"Please!" he said quietly. "I have brought the memsahib's coat. There is fever in the night mists."

"Thank you, Mara." Evelyn took the coat and smiled at him. "I'm going back in a moment. You're very thoughtful."

"Mara thinks always of the memsahib's health and happiness." With a bow, that was almost a salaam, the speaker turned and shuffled away into the gloom. When the soft "clack, clack" of his toe slippers had died away, Evelyn said:

"What a jewel he is. I couldn't have held together this long except for his devotion. I think he loves me like a dog."

"Mara is priceless," Philip agreed. "I—wonder if he overheard what we were saying."

The woman shrugged indifferently. "Suppose he did? He knows everything, anyhow. Mara has brains. . . . Good night dear." She rose and put her small hand in

Philip's, her eyes, unnaturally large and luminous in the moonlight, looked up wistfully into his. "It's a wretched situation and there's no way out that I can see. We're all in a trap, Geoffrey as well as you and I."

Philip pressed his lips to the cold fingers that lay in his, huskily he said: "Good night, Evelyn. Be brave. We'll find a way out, somehow."

He turned away for he could not trust himself to look longer into her eyes. A moment and she was gone.

The next week was the most trying period that Philip had ever endured. He scarcely knew where or how to turn: Geoffrey's behaviour to his wife provoked in him a murderous resentment, his own love for her and the knowledge that she loved him was maddening; life here in daily contact with each other was a torture to both of them, and Geoffrey gloated malevolently over their misery. He was utterly inhuman, utterly unlike himself. Incapable of loving Evelyn to the exclusion of other women, he nevertheless resented her change of feeling towards him: she bored him and yet he could not give her up. He had been free all his life and she had stolen his liberty, and this was his revenge. He hated himself for being untrue to her as bitterly as he hated himself for his uncontrollable cowardice about snakes and yet he was powerless to combat either weakness. Doubtless he was a bit unbalanced—there are many such on the far frontiers—for no ordinary man, no white man at least, can endure life in a place like Penambuli for six years and retain his mental and moral poise.

As for Philip he brooded over the situation hourly. His time at Bukit Satu was limited and yet he could not bear to contemplate leaving: his departure would doom Evelyn to a living death. Nevertheless she steadfastly refused to go away with him; neither would she listen to his offer to send her home and provide for her at his expense. Pride and inherent decency had something to do with her attitude and besides, she was too crushed, too hopeless to make a determined revolt. Philip dreaded to contemplate what she might do when she found herself here alone with Geoffrey. On her part she more than once implored the latter to let her divorce him but he only laughed at her; he asserted that she was his and he proposed to keep her, she was necessary to his contentment and he seemed to derive a sadistic satisfaction in forcing his unwelcome attentions upon her. The woman all but went mad.

She kept the door between their rooms locked but it was impossible to evade him altogether. Nearly every evening he drank himself into a stupor and during certain stages of this process he was liable to do anything. His bronzed skin had turned a sickly yellow, heavy pouches had formed under his eyes. Much of his time he spent with Mineh.

Life for the three Europeans on the plantation grew into a sort of nightmare: daily the strain increased. The powder was dry, any spark would have ignited it.

Their restlessness communicated itself even to Mara: he, too, changed his habits. For many years he had been

used to his after-tiffin siesta—Heaven knows he got little enough sleep, for Geoffrey called him at all times of night, and the two hours at late midday when life in the tropics stops to drowse were about the only ones he could really call his own; nevertheless, several times when the household was asleep, Philip saw him leave his quarters and wander away into regions out of sight.

The heat was stifling, Philip wondered what the boy could be doing. Had he felt impelled to follow he would have been surprised and mystified at the fellow's actions for Mara appeared to occupy himself in idly exploring the unkempt fields of lalang grass near the plantation boundaries and even the scrubby thickets along the jungle's edge. He walked slowly and with extremest caution but without apparent purpose; he was intensely alert, his roving eyes were bright, his soft soled slippers made no sound. Occasionally he halted and stared fixedly at something, then circled off and renewed his aimless quest. Day after day he braved the blistering heat, returning to the bungalow with nothing more perhaps than a handful of gaily colored flowers for the memsahib's room.

At last, however, he found what he was looking for and its discovery rooted him to his tracks for several minutes. He stood rigid, staring in mingled fear and fascination; his nostrils dilated and the breath hissed faintly between his teeth. Finally he retreated, slowly at first, until he had put some distance between himself and whatever it was that had challenged him, then he

drew his knife and cut a forked stick the which he trimmed, then tested carefully. As silently as before he stole forward, moving more slowly the further he retraced his steps. He paused at last and poised himself; his lips had compressed themselves, beads of sweat appeared upon his coffee-colored face, his muscles were tensed: a full minute, two minutes, passed the while his eyes measured distance and took note of many other things, imperceptibly the stick was out-thrust, lowered. Then he lunged. The breath issued from his lungs in a savage grunt; fear, triumph, ferocity blazed in his face.

A scuffling and a threshing began, the grass was beaten flat: Mara leaned upon his stick and uttered words unintelligible to European ears. After a while he slid his right hand down the stick and closed his fingers over what it held pinioned: when he rose, a scaly, wriggling, five foot serpent was wrapped about his arm: it looped and writhed and whipped against his body. Its head protruded an inch or two beyond his rigid fist, its horny mouth was spread wide and a flickering, forked tongue, incredibly active, licked his knuckles. Strangely enough, those open jaws exposed not the usual pair of hideous, venom-laden fangs but rows of teeth, sharp, wicked, poisonous teeth curved for tearing.

There was a light of victory in the Malay's face as he seized a straining loop with his left hand and subdued its struggles. Bearing his captive before him he picked his way back across the field to a thicket near the coolie lines where he had concealed a wooden box with a

hinged lid. With the utmost circumspection he managed to untwist the snake's coils, thrust it into its prison and bang the lid shut. He fastened the lid securely. This done, he breathed deep with relief and worked the cramps out of his forearm. He was wringing wet. Having hidden the box in a hole and covered it with dry leaves, he returned to his quarters, and lay down upon his sleeping mat, well content with himself.

That evening, as usual, he spread out his master's evening change of white clothes, supervised the preparation of the dinner and set the table with care. He put an orchid at the memsahib's place, a fragile flower of heavenly beauty. He hoped she would pin it on her breast. The dinner he served, as always, silently and with meticulous attention to detail, then he saw to Geoffrey's drinks in the living room and methodically began his homelier evening tasks. When the last of these was done he retired to the back porch of the bungalow and fingered the strings of a queerly shaped musical instrument of Malay design. It gave forth plaintive sounds which soothed him.

There was a scene in the living room again tonight, angry words and accusations, some of which Mara overheard. The memsahib ran sobbing to her chamber finally, followed by a derisory oath from her husband and the tinkle of a broken glass. Mara strummed the wire strings and sang softly to the yellow moon.

Not until the *tuan besar* lurched out of the bungalow and off in the direction of the quarters where Minch

roomed did the house-boy cease his singing. Then he laid down his instrument and went to fetch the wooden box.

Geoffrey came in after midnight and called,

"Boy!"

"Tuan." Mara appeared almost instantly.

"Whiskey-soda, quick."

When this was brought the master inquired thickly:

"Did you put a new wick in my night lamp?"

"It has been done, tuan."

"Good. It burned short. It went out last night and I woke up in the dark. Can't stand the dark. Too many—*things*, in the dark. Crawling things. Don't let it happen a second time."

"*Saya, tuan.*"

"And be sure I have plenty of cool water. I'm going to be thirsty."

"I wait only until the tuan is ready——"

"Carry it in now. I'll be ready for bed after another drink or two."

"*Slamat tidor!*" Mara bowed and went for the water jug. He placed it upon the table at the head of Geoffrey's bed, lighted the night lamp, then he returned to the back porch, lifted the wooden box and shook it vigorously. Instantly there came a hissing and a movement from within. Mara continued to shake the box until it jumped and creaked and vibrated as if from the pent up fury of its occupant. He stole down the hall, with his foot he thrust open the screen door to the empty

bedroom, then he oscillated the box again until the straining coils inside threatened to burst its sides. He unfastened the lid and deftly dumped the snake out upon the floor; quickly he closed the screen door between it and him.

When Geoffrey staggered off to bed ten minutes later, Mara locked up the living room, put out the lights and departed for his own quarters. He could hear a queer, gasping and groaning in the master's bedroom, but it was not loud enough to disturb the memsahib. The *tuan besar* groaned a good deal lately in his sleep and when he was drunk he made a good deal of noise in going to bed: sometimes he knocked things over. A clumsy man! But soon he would be quiet, for all time. Happily the door between his and the memsahib's room was closed and locked, so she was safe from that snake that bit and tore like a tiger. In the morning, when he, Mara, brought in the coffee he would kill the thing with his *parang*.

The house boy stretched himself out upon his mat and composed himself for an untroubled and refreshing sleep. All things are as Tuan Allah wills.

AHMAT SEBAM



THE PUBLIC WIFE

VIII

The Public Wife

IN the shade of a tamarind tree beside the dirt road leading to the little mosque old Ahmat Sebam, guide and friend of the village youth, sat cross-legged. At his back was the *kampung's* drab cluster of huts; facing him, three youths squatted, tracing designs in the dust with their brown fingers. The boys were just growing into manhood and they listened eagerly to what he said. The residents of Saparoea, both young and old, treated Ahmat with respect, for there was a benevolent dignity about him and he had travelled far—to Java, to Borneo, to certain of the Moluccas—and to simple folks like these he was a superior person.

I very distinctly remember thinking as I came upon this group that a portrait painter would have looked twice at Ahmat sitting there beneath the tamarind tree, for he had the tranquil air of a man at peace with his soul. Time and trouble had plowed deep furrows in his face but there was no tired droop to the corners of his mouth; his grizzled hair was plentiful; his eyes—humorous and friendly—were as clear as a boy's. His broadcloth *baju* and plaid *sarong* were, as always, freshly

laundered, and his feet were encased in clean white *spatus*, for he was a man of means.

Occasionally a huge-wheeled dray, loaded with sacks of rice or copra and drawn by a team of sweating coolies—the people of Saparoeca were too poor to buy oxen or water buffalo—lumbered along the road, its rusted, greaseless wheels squealing like pigs being leisurely dragged to the slaughter-house. Old women passed bearing on their heads flat baskets of fish or sago cakes. One and all called a salutation to Ahmat and he responded in his deep, sing-song voice without in the least losing the thread of what he was saying to the three youngsters. A man so ancient and decrepit that he was obliged to walk with the support of two sticks shuffled past and Ahmat sent one of the boys after him with a couple of copper coins. The ancient snatched at them with a claw-like hand, exhorting Allah, in a high cackle, to send the blessings of peace and plenty to his benefactor, then he proceeded on his uncertain way, looking more like a bent skeleton than a human being.

“As I have said,” Ahmat continued his discourse, “Saparoeca is a poor place for anyone who is ambitious to make provision for his old age. Observe Haidar!” With out-thrust chin he indicated the wretched figure retreating down the road. “All the days of his early life he toiled honorably with his fishing *prahu* and in the rice fields but he made barely enough to supply his immediate needs. When his joints stiffened and his muscles turned traitor he was as poor as though he had squandered his

years in idleness. So it is likely to be with all who remain here. *Ya Allah!* It is sad.

"No doubt," he proceeded after a ruminative pause, "our all-wise creator put us here for some purpose of his own but he did not decree that we stay rooted to this very soil. The time has come for you to put idleness behind you and to shoulder the work of men: I counsel you to journey without delay to richer countries where honorable effort is more justly rewarded. Having made yourselves secure against old age you may decide, as I did, to return to the place of your birth, which will be pleasing to your parents and a recognition of Allah's beneficence."

Another pause followed during which the three young men continued, without speaking, to make designs in the dust. Silence in the presence of elders is demanded of the Malay youth; he may not chatter nor ask questions unless invited to do so.

Ahmat's deep voice sounded again. "Many callings there are to choose from. The bazaars—ships—rubber plantations—the trades of shoe-making and tailoring—and a multitude of others, but none of them afford so pleasant an existence or offer the same rewards as that of serving a white tuan in his house. It is a position of honor, for a faithful servant becomes his master's friend and if the master is good the servant acquires merit from him. He eats plentifully and sleeps always in quarters secure from the night mists—both food and lodging being provided by the tuan. He may, therefore, lay by

the greater part of his earnings against that day when he is no longer able to earn.

"But much is expected of a house servant. He must be clean in his person, he must be honest, truthful, willing and diligent. He must see all, hear all—and say nothing. At all times he is ignorant—except when questioned by the master. Then he knows everything. My advice to you is to seek employment such as I followed. Be sure that you enter the service of a tuan who is upright in habit for he will be generous of heart and his virtues will bring profit to you and ease to your declining years.

"It was my excellent fortune to serve such a tuan—Allah protect him in health and in sickness—and when he had finished here and returned to England he gave me a thousand guilders. That, added to what I had saved, made me a man of substance and enabled me to spend the evening of my life in honor among my own people.

"It is said here in the village that I squander my money upon the decrepit and the unworthy and that misfortune will overtake me but the white people have a saying that bread cast upon the waters will draw fish, and my master was forever repeating it. It is a fact that Providence rewarded him and I remember once——"

Ahmat broke into a quiet chuckle: the boys looked up at him expectantly.

"Listen earnestly," he said, "and you shall hear how great good fortune came in a strange manner to tuan Ross Hewlett in repayment for an unselfish act. There

can be no harm in telling of it now for he has been long gone from this country and it may profit you as it profited him and me."

Ross Hewlett was in his thirtieth year and he measured over six feet, so Ahmat described him: his features were well-shaped, his skin deeply and permanently bronzed by the tropical sun. One would have been hard put to it to size the man up at a glance, for a bull-dog English jaw was contradicted by gray eyes which might have belonged to a gentle priest.

Hewlett was the owner of several pearl fishing luggers that worked the waters surrounding the Arus, a small group of islands at no great distance from the West coast of Papua, and at the time of Ahmat's story he had experienced a most disastrous season. To begin with, the catch of both shell and pearls had been extremely poor; then, careless divers had grounded two of his boats upon reefs where they had broken to pieces, and in addition he had suffered from several attacks of malaria which had rendered him incapable of watching operations with the necessary alertness. No matter which side of the islands his boats had gone to fish there the wind had blown, making it difficult for the divers to work. Misfortune had followed misfortune, so it seemed. Ill luck had made sport of Ahmat and his master.

By the end of the season Hewlett was pretty deeply in debt and completely stumped for ready cash; only for a substantial loan made to him by another pearler he

would have had to sell some of his boats to meet his men's wages at the "lay-up." Things indeed were bad. . . . Ahmat shook his head at the memory. On top of all this Hewlett had received a letter from his wife in England stating that she had sold their house in Surrey and had bought a larger one: she asked him to send her a cheque for twelve hundred pounds as soon as possible. The white man who adored his wife, after the fashion of all good tuans, realized that this request could not have come at a more unfortunate time, and the Malay, who read the letter, after the fashion of all good Eastern servants, agreed with him.

Dobo, where Hewlett lived when ashore, is the one and only town in the Aru Islands. As described to the three youthful listeners, it was hardly a town at all but a shabby settlement which had grown up on a flat point jutting out from the jungle, and it consisted of three rows of wood and galvanized iron buildings divided by two sandy streets. The stores belonged to Arabs, Chinamen, Japanese and Malays—the dwellings were for the most part Japanese yoshiwaras and Malay houses of equal ill-repute. Near the beach were a few bungalows where lived the white men who owned the pearl fishing boats.

During nine months of the year Dobo is deserted, for the pearling craft are all at sea and they do not return until the monsoon comes to churn the water and make it too cloudy for the divers to work.

As this season approaches the town awakens: it yawns and stretches and the blood begins to course through it.

The Dutch steamer brings a hundred or more Japanese girls, most of whom have been sent by old Ariki, owner of innumerable yoshiwaras scattered like chain stores through every town of importance from Yokohama down. They come with a happy, care-free spirit, these girls, each carrying a bundle of gay kimonos and a box of combs, hairpins and face paints. Scores of Malay girls arrive to fill the native houses. Ahmat called it a mighty gathering of the "public wives." Also come bravely dressed Eurasian and Japanese men, illicit dealers in pearls, who assemble to buy secretly and at bargain prices from divers and crew the gems that have been stolen during the working period.

It is a simple matter to steal pearls. The old man, who had once been a lugger hand, told the boys how it was done. When the master is out of sight of the luggers, the shells are plunged into a bucket of hot water. This causes them to open and if there are pearls inside they may be seen and removed. After a while the shells close again of their own accord and no one can tell that they have been tampered with. Many pearls are stolen each year in this way.

From the steamer that brings the women and pearl divers to Dobo great quantities of bales and cases are sent ashore for the stores. These contain clothes and food, saki, beer and gin. The storekeepers are no longer idle but hasten to and fro in the heat swearing at the coolies who do not bring the stuff up from the beach quickly enough to suit them. In the stores there is much un-

packing and merchandise is laid out in readiness for the profitable season that is at hand. Rooms at the back of these stores are prepared for gambling and cock-fighting.

Then, when the muttering monsoon finally breaks, the pearling luggers are beached to be cleaned, painted and repaired. The divers, tenders and crew—Japanese and Malays for the most part—are paid off and Satan comes to Dobo. Seven or eight hundred men who have been cooped up on shipboard for many months, each with a pouch of money, swarm over the place and turn it into a hell.

The yoshiwaras are like madhouses. Day and night for the next two months they are filled with drunken, shouting men. There is music and merriment, delirium and woe. The gambling houses are thronged. Money flows like water and fishermen sometimes lose their whole year's earnings at a single sitting. Needless to say, there are quarrels and robberies, stabbings and shootings; one hears triumphant laughter, screams of terror and shouts of despair. Dancing girls, entirely devoid of covering, perform snake-like contortions for those who pay to see them. The illicit pearl dealers furtively ply their trade. Occasionally the body of a murdered man is found on the beach, but people are too busy with life to concern themselves greatly with death. Such is Dobo in the lay-up season. Through it all the few white men go about their business as heedless of the pandemonium as if it were imaginary.

The lay-up was about a week old and Dobo's madness

was at its height when Ahmat's tuan, during the course of his customary evening stroll, heard a sound of weeping. Investigation disclosed the fact that it came from a girl seated in dejection upon the back steps of a yoshiwara, but Hewlett passed on being too deeply concerned with his own troubles to bother himself with those of a stranger. He had proceeded no more than a dozen paces, however, before it occurred to him that this was not the first time he had heard this same girl grieving in this very spot. He hesitated, then he retraced his steps and inquired brusquely:

"Why are you crying?"

At the sound of Hewlett's voice the girl looked up. Perhaps she was more than a bit surprised at being addressed in her own language by a white man.

"Make haste. Tell me what's wrong," he directed her.

"Oh, tuan," she said, "everything is wrong. I am most unhappy." Ahmat in telling his story mimicked, very cleverly, his master's voice and the higher pitched tones of the girl.

"Yes—but what exactly is the trouble? Or don't you want to tell me?"

"It is not that, tuan. It would take so long and . . ."

"Well, if it's a long story we'd better step down to my bungalow and talk it over. Come along." Stooping, he raised her up and led her by the arm back whence he had come.

It was when they entered the bungalow that Ahmat first saw the girl and he described her as very young and

as beautiful as a delicate flower newly opened. She was small and slender, and her eyes were not mere slits like those of most Japanese; they were large and warm and lustrous. Her nose was straight, too, and her nostrils sensitive; her mouth had a pretty pout that made one think of a child's. Hewlett plainly was as much impressed as his servant at this exquisite creature dressed in a soft blue kimono that might have taken its coloring from a cloudless sky.

"Sit down," he said, placing a chair for her.

She watched him, without speaking, as he filled and lighted a pipe, the while Ahmat went for a whiskey-soda.

"Now," the white man said, seating himself opposite her, "tell me all about it."

The girl promptly dropped to her knees, bowed her head and humbly thanked him for condescending to listen.

Hewlett lifted her up and put her back on the chair. Ahmat well knew that in spite of six years in the tropics his master was still embarrassed by certain of its customs.

"Don't do that," he said. "Sit up and talk to me. I can see you better then."

"Tuan," she began after a moment, "my name is Otoya and I am seventeen. I come from a little village in the interior of Japan where my parents are small rice farmers. They are poor, so poor indeed that often we go without food to eat. Like many other girls of my class I entered the yoshiwara, for which I received an advance from my employer of five hundred yen. This I did not because I

wished to lead that kind of life but because it was the only way—" Otoya's voice quavered and failed her. She finished simply, "The five hundred yen I gave to my parents.

"In Japan," she explained, "it is not counted shameful for a girl to engage in such an occupation but I did not fully understand what it meant. My only thought was to help my parents, as my mother had helped hers. With Arika I signed the customary contract. It provided that one third of my earnings would be mine, another third would go to the yoshiwara, and the remaining third would be retained by him until the advance was cleared. After that I will be free to leave his service if I so desired. Most of the girls continue in the houses until they have saved enough money to attract a husband."

A wry expression passed across Hewlett's face, but he said nothing.

"On the day of signing the contract," Otoya went on, "I was shipped with other girls to Dobo. At first, I was ill from the motion of the ship and heart-broken at leaving my people: later, tuan, when I was less ill, terror overcame me. I tried to put it out of my mind but— Oh, sir, I think I shall kill myself!" The girl fell to plucking her fingers, she began to shake wretchedly.

"When we came to Dobo I wept for many hours, whereupon the old woman in charge of the yoshiwara laughed at me and scolded me. Each day there have been more and more scoldings because I—I am afraid. When the other girls put on their fine clothes, I run away

to that step where you found me. Ariki's old woman calls me timid and foolish and dishonest; she has threatened to cast me out into the street. That would force my parents to refund the advance and the cost of sending me to Dobo. It is a matter of law."

"Yes—I suppose it is." Hewlett nodded.

"But, tuan," Otoya cried, "we cannot return the money for it has been spent to repair the farm. I greatly fear Ariki will send my parents to prison. And yet how can I do what is required of me in the yoshiwara? Each day I promise that I will—but when night comes my courage fails." Tears of distress overflowed the speaker's eyes.

Ahmat confessed, in telling the story, that he felt a great compassion for the little Japanese girl, she was so young, so dainty, and so deeply agitated, and he could see that his employer was likewise concerned for he sat a long while staring at the bowl of his pipe, rolling it between his fingers. Finally he looked up and asked sharply:

"How much do you owe that infernal place?"

Otoya calculated rapidly: including her passage from Japan, she estimated that her debt must be close to seven hundred yen.

"Not a lot of money at any other time," Hewlett growled, as if to himself, then he scratched his head. "Oh, hell!" he cried after a pause. He rose and went to his safe.

"There you are," he told Otoya, handing her a little heap of notes. "That'll buy you out."

The girl was too bewildered to speak. For a while she sat staring first at the notes and then at Hewlett. When at last she found her voice, she murmured: "You wish to buy me for yourself. Is that it, tuan?"

"Certainly not!" The Englishman shook his head. "You see, I'm married and—well, I don't want anything like that."

"Then I will work as a servant in your bungalow until I have earned this money."

"Oh, no you won't." Hewlett laughed shortly. "I never have female servants and I certainly wouldn't risk one as pretty as you are. Take the money as a present and forget it. Drop in here before the next steamer and I'll fix you up with a ticket home."

"But, tuan," protested Otoyá between whose eyes little creases of worry appeared, "I must repay you. It is only honorable. If you had me to live with I should not be unhappy. That would be different from the yoshiwara. The other tuans here have mistresses."

Hewlett's bronzed face went a shade lighter before he blurted out, "Run along! I'm not interested in what other tuans may do." With a hand on her shoulder he propelled her towards the door the while she tearfully expressed her gratitude for what he had done.

He looked after her as she ran lightly up the street, then he went indoors and mixed himself another whiskey and soda. For the next half hour he sat following with his eyes the spirals of smoke that rose from his pipe.

Otoyá returned to the bungalow several times during

the next few days and she and Ahmat became quite friends. She told him frankly that she was urging Hewlett to let her earn the money he had given her, but that he refused. On the last of these visits, just before she left, she suddenly threw her arms about her benefactor's neck and kissed him on the mouth, then she ran away without looking back.

According to old Ahmat, the girl was one of those butterfly-colored, light-footed creatures who dance through life; she was always running.

"I tell you all this," he informed his listeners, "to prove that an honorable man can tread a swamp without miring. Dobo was a wicked place: no other tuan in the town would have let that girl go, but Ross Hewlett was faithful to all his vows in business and otherwise. From him I learned the *strength* of the strong."

It was a matter of two weeks before either master or servant saw the little Japanese again and she came finally to announce that she was to be married to one Horiguchi, a countryman of hers. This Horiguchi, as both men knew, was an illicit pearl buyer and a thorough scoundrel. He was well off, however, a great dandy, and Hewlett doubtless believed that his little friend considered herself fortunate in making such a match. After a brief hesitation, he said:

"That's fine, Otoya. I wish you all the luck in the world." He took her tiny hand in his and looked down at her with a smile in his gray eyes, but Ahmat fancied the man was both disappointed and hurt that she should

prove so mercenary. Marriage to a fellow like Horiguchi was little better than life in the yoshiwara.

"And I wish you very much luck, too," she answered. "Long life and many sons, tuan, and the richest pearl in the ocean. I shall never forget—" Her voice caught in her throat, she ceased speaking and fixed the tall Englishman with a strange look.

This time when she turned away she did not run: her dancing feet were leaden.

That night she married Horiguchi.

The end of the lay-up season was in sight but it brought no relief to Hewlett for he was having a desperate time to find the money with which to refit his boats. He had been unable to send that twelve hundred pounds to his wife and he was in receipt of a letter from the London firm that supplied his diving gear regretting that they could not execute his last order until he met his present indebtedness to them. His local credit was all but gone, too: he slept little these nights and his lean face grew leaner daily.

One evening as he sat at his desk casting about hopelessly for a way out of his difficulties a breathless Japanese woman burst in upon him. She was a total stranger but she began excitedly,

"Tuan! In the house of Horiguchi is cruel trouble. He beats Otoyá and he threatens to kill her. You are her friend——"

Hewlett charged past her and a few seconds later he stormed bare-headed through an excited group of yellow

and brown people clustered about the pearl buyer's door. A tempest was raging inside the living room, its cheap furniture was broken, ornaments, table covers, cushions were scattered about the floor. The hanging kerosene lamp revealed Otoya crouching in a corner, her kimono was torn, there were bruises on her arms and shoulders and red finger prints upon her throat. Her eyes were distended with terror. Over her stood Horiguchi shouting and waving his arms. He turned at Hewlett's entrance and his face fell into its usual insolent lines, his body stiffened rigidly.

Wholly ignoring him the white man bent over Otoya and raised her.

"What's the matter?" he inquired. "Have you been a bad girl?"

"No, tuan. I have been a good wife but he goes with other women. When I beg him not to bring shame upon me he beats me. I am afraid he will——"

"She is my wife, not yours," Horiguchi met the Englishman's threat with a scowl. "Is it your business that I go with other women?"

"No. But I'll make it my business to see that you don't knock this child about." Hewlett's muscular hand wrapped itself in the breast of the Jap's white tunic. He cuffed Horiguchi and shook him until his heels beat a tattoo upon the floor and his head flopped drunkenly, threatening to break the neck that supported it. The onlookers squealed with amusement.

"Now, you thieving rat," Hewlett flung the wretch

sprawling, "that's only a taste of what I'll give you if you lay hands on her again." Horiguchi's blazing, bloodshot eyes met his, then dropped, and the white man walked out of his place.

Returning home, still in a towering rage, he recited to his servant what had happened and he grew madder as he told of it. It was an outrage: the Jap was a worthless, crooked swine: he was sorry now that he had not warned Otoya about him—told the poor child what she was letting herself in for. But he had hesitated to do so for fear of—well, complications. Otoya's flowerlike beauty had caused him enough uneasiness of spirit as it was, and he had figured that she would be much better off married than single. Even married to Horiguchi. Ahmat's master frowned and muttered and shook his head; he roamed through the bungalow with heavy tread until a late hour; plainly the memory of Otoya's kiss was still fresh in his mind.

The monsoon promised to break up earlier than usual that year. Yamamoto, one of Hewlett's divers, was the first out with his lugger, but he had been gone less than twenty-four hours when the wind blew afresh. The following morning he was back in port again, and with his tender he pulled ashore through the choppy, white-capped waves.

"No good, master," he declared, shaking his head as he came up to Hewlett's veranda. Always a keen worker he was disappointed at having been driven in. "Just four

shells I catch, master, then come blow like hell. Maybe 'nother week, everything all right." Yamamoto's tender dropped the wet bag containing the four shells and he and the diver bowed and sauntered off to their favorite haunts.

Hewlett kicked the bag into a room that was used as a store.

Late that night as Ahmat lay on his sleeping mat he was awakened by a tug at his hair. Automatically, his hand darted to the *kris* under his pillow, and he leapt into a sitting position.

"Be quiet," a voice admonished him in a whisper. "It is Otoyā."

Ahmat shook the sleep out of his head, wondering what could have brought the girl to his room.

"Listen, Ahmat," she said excitedly. "I have come to you for help. Horiguchi beat me again today and I am running away from him. The steamer sails at midnight and you must assist me to get aboard unseen. Horiguchi may be on the streets or at the steamer saying good-bye to friends."

"But your ticket?"

"That I can secure after the boat sails—I have money. Quick! We have less than half an hour. You will help me, Ahmat?"

"Assuredly. My master would wish it," said the Malay.

At this came a moan from the girl. There was insufficient light in the room to distinguish her features but

Ahmat could see from the sudden drooping of her figure that she had given way to a grief unutterable. She wilted down upon the floor beside him and for a while she rocked to and fro, swaying like a willow wand, whispering Hewlett's name over and over again. It was worse than death for her to leave.

Ahmat reached forth and touched her hair, saying, "Other women have wept for him as you weep, little blossom, but he was deaf. It is better for you to go."

Otoya nodded: she bit down on her grief, she swallowed her sobs. Her hand, wet with tears felt for Ahmat's and pressed something into it.

"Give this to him," she murmured, "but tell him not that it came from me."

At this point in his story, the speaker paused, his kindly eyes glowed, as in memory he recalled that hour: when he resumed it was in another tone.

"I spoke truly when I said that many women had loved my tuan: he had a way that made slaves of them. There was a Dutchman's wife in Amboyna, and a girl from the rubber farms, also a missionary's daughter whose hair was yellower than English gold. In the time I served him there were several, but none I am sure loved him more honestly than little Otoya, the public wife.

"For a while we spoke, lip to ear, like a couple of robbers and the minutes sped by; then I took her by the hand and led her out of there and down to the beach. But it was as if the roots of her being had made themselves fast

to that soil and tore the heart bleeding from her breast as I dragged her with me.

"It was a blustery night. The wind god's cheeks were full and he spilled his breath on us as I paddled out to the steamer. My *prahu* bobbed like a gourd and it spun in circles before I finally drove it alongside the ship and set Otoyá's feet upon the steerage companionway. We were wet with spray but it was less salt than her tears. She waved at me. '*Ada!*' I called softly, then she crept up on deck and I let the wind hurry me back like a soaring gull.

"Tuan Hewlett heard of the runaway the next morning at breakfast and from the lips of Horiguchi, not me. The Japanese was like a madman and I heard him shouting threats and curses as he ran up to the veranda and flung himself through the door. I was the first to meet him but he had a *kris* and it was only by Allah's mercy that he failed to strike me down.

"The man was blind with rage and bent upon murder, nevertheless the tuan seized him. He bent his arm back until it all but snapped then he kicked him like a wet sack out into the street. A giant in strength and swift of action in moments of peril. Later that day I passed Horiguchi's house where he lay groaning and weeping on his bed and people laughed because he took the loss of a woman so deeply to heart.

"At breakfast the second morning thereafter the tuan sniffed and said:

“‘Ahmat, there’s a damned bad smell around here. Does it come from your kitchen?’”

“‘No, tuan. It arises from those shells which are spoiling in the storeroom.’

“‘Of course,’ he said. ‘I meant to open them but—I’ve been half frantic. Fetch me a knife and I’ll get rid of the things.’

“He was gone for five minutes, ten minutes, then he returned, walking like one in a sleep. He turned staring eyes upon me, his face was white.

“‘Ahmat! Look!’ he whispered. ‘Tell me if I am dreaming.’

“He opened his right hand which was clenched.

“In my travels I have seen many fine pearls; pearls that Rajahs have bought at fabulous figures, pearls that brought buyers from London and Paris and others that sold on the beach for many thousands of guilders, but never have I seen a gem like that in the brown palm of my master’s hand. It was enormous, it was perfect, it shone with a magic light from within.

“All the years he had spent in the islands my tuan had dreamed of a pearl like that, he was shaking like a woman and muttering something about the ‘nick of time’, and about it’s lying there forgotten for days while he was sick with worry.

“‘Tuan! Tuan!’ . . . I had to shake him to make him heed my voice. ‘Hide it, quickly, and say nothing. Let no eyes in Dobo rest upon it or our lives will not be worth a kipping. Jewels of prodigious worth bring either

great happiness or great misery: unless you are more than careful, this one will be red with your blood before it leaves the island.'

"He nodded. Slowly his hand closed and he passed into his room. I never saw the pearl again, for which Allah be praised.

"A month later my master sold his luggers and went home to England. We wept at our parting for there was never a better tuan than he nor a servant more loyal than I."

Old Ahmat Sebam, guide and friend of the village youth, watched the faces of his listeners.

"Assuredly the pearl was sent as a reward for your noble master's generosity," one of them said and the other nodded gravely. There was a moment of discussion which the first to speak interrupted by asking,

"But Otoyá—she gave you a keepsake in her fingers wet with tears. I am curious to know what it was."

Ahmat broke into a gratified chuckle. "I commend you as a boy of wit. You have a memory for essentials. Purposely I withheld the flavor of the meal for the final bite. Allah works his will in devious ways: it was the mighty pearl she gave me. A coolie had extracted it from one of his master's shells and sold it to Horiguchi. She discovered its hiding place and took it from him. That night in the whispering dark she made me promise to put it into the tuan's possession without his knowing whence it came: it was about that which we argued so long. At first I refused to do her bidding for the pearl

had been stolen twice, but my master was in sore straits and the jewel would have meant Otoyá's death if she had kept it. It held more menace than a cobra. She pled with me that the tuan had more right to it than either the coolie or Horiguchi, and for that matter it might have been stolen from one of his shells.

"But how to put it into his hands? I fought with the problem until I was reminded of Yamamoto's bag in the storeroom. If a shell may be opened with hot water to take a pearl out, it may likewise be opened to put one in. Allah showed me the way."

Ahmat rose, smiling, and walked away towards the tiny white mosque beyond the *kampong*, for it was nearing the hour of his devotions.*

ROGER ALDRIDGE



IT WAS WRITTEN THUS

IX

It Was Written Thus

NO—I have never been to the island of Mapia,” said Graavelink, the Controleur of Banda, replying to my question. “Don’t know anything about it except that there is just one white man living there. Usual thing, I suppose,” he added, shrugging his heavy shoulders. “Some down-and-out fellow pigging it along with the gin bottle and a colored woman. You know the kind. He’ll be glad enough to let you have a room for a few guilders a week.”

In the course of my wanderings through tropical countries in search of entomological specimens I have run across numerous men of the type described by Graavelink; men who, for one reason or another, have quit the game of grappling with life and drifted messily downwards until they have become mere human garbage. Usually it is the climate that has beaten them—or they have done something which makes it advisable for them to keep away from parts more easily accessible to agents of the law.

During the trip in the comfortable Dutch Packet steamer to New Guinea—the first leg of my journey—I several times pictured what was ahead of me. I could

see this white man's brokendown hovel; the man himself, gaunt from frequent bouts of malaria, gin-sodden, wearing dirty cotton trousers and a sweat-stained singlet. I could see his woman, fat and shrill-voiced, slopping about the house in frayed slippers and an unappetizing dressing gown. At meal times scraggy hens, stepping cautiously, would come in at the front door and pick up bits of food dropped from the table until the woman's screaming imprecations sent them scuttling back into the weed-cluttered compound. And I would be given a room smelling of sourness, dust, and mould. Oh yes—I knew what to expect. I had seen so many of these ghastly places inhabited by white men "gone native." They were all alike.

Although, in my time, I have had to make do with many a foul den for shelter and should have been hardened to discomfort, I found, on this occasion, the prospect of spending several weeks in wretched surroundings mightily depressing. Perhaps my liver was a bit sluggish. There were times when I almost regretted not having gone in for banking or some such respectable calling that would not necessitate my leaving my pleasant bachelor cottage back in Connecticut. Finally, I consoled myself as best I could with the reflection that any sort of a roof was preferable to sleeping, as I had often been obliged to do, in a tent in the jungle, to be devoured by fever-carrying mosquitoes and washed out by torrential tropical storms.

The steamer dropped anchor at Wasior—a God-

forgotten village—just about daybreak one morning. There was nothing in Wasior to induce me to remain there a minute, so I decided to leave immediately in order to reach Mapia before dark.

Within half an hour the Chinese storekeeper who was arranging transport for me and looking after my baggage reported that everything was ready for my departure. We walked down to the water's edge together, and there I found a slender *prahu* manned by a dozen huge, ebony-skinned Papuans, fuzzy-haired and wild-eyed, each holding a short heavy paddle. I had never seen a more bloodthirsty collection anywhere. Their appearance and the knowledge that a goodly proportion of Papuans are cannibals made me, to put it quite mildly, more than a little uneasy.

"Look here," I said to the Chinaman in my faltering Malay, "what about those boys? I hope they are—reliable. I mean, you don't suppose they'll bat me over the head with one of those *diongs* when we're out at sea and make their tiffin off me, eh?"

"I cannot be sure," he answered, smiling. "But I think perhaps they will not make trouble for the tuan."

After a moment's thought I realized that if I changed the crew I should only be able to get another lot just like them. It was no use being nervous—probably these fellows were quite all right. And, after all, I had often travelled in queer company before. Furthermore, I carried a revolver in a side pocket of my coat.

At a signal from the Chinaman one of the crew waded

ashore. He stooped while I mounted onto his shoulders, after which he carried me, as easily as one would carry a child, out through the shallow water and deposited me in the stern of the *prahu*. I checked up my baggage and gave the word to go ahead. Whereupon, their paddles dug deep into the water and we literally shot forward.

It was a typical day for that part of the world. As the sun climbed higher and its rays became more concentrated the heat struck through my clothes as though I were standing at an open furnace door. Soon, the thwart grew so hot on either side of me that I dared not rest my hands on it.

Hour after hour I sat there and grilled. The sky was a dazzling whitish-blue; no breath of breeze came to temper, even for a second, the malevolent intensity of the heat. My eyeballs seemed to be blistering from the glare thrown back at them by the water's glassy surface. And through it all the crew went on paddling with powerful, rhythmical strokes. Their muscular bodies were bathed in sweat which fell in drops from their chins and elbows.

Towards noon a streak of black showed up over the horizon. A few minutes later it had grown into a huge cloud. I pulled on my oilskin and waited for the squall.

Presently I could see the rain racing over the smooth water towards our *prahu*. It came upon us with a curious hissing like the sound of steam escaping from a locomotive. So dense was the downpour that it quickly

drenched me through despite my oilskin—but its cooling effect was most welcome.

I was absorbed in watching the silver strings of rain driving holes into the sea when the wind out of the squall hit us with the roar and force of an explosion. Our light craft listed over to such an alarming angle that I thought we were bound to put our lee gunwale under and swamp, but she gradually righted herself as the crew eased her round in a quarter-circle so that we lay stern-on to the weather.

In a very few moments the water about us was lashed into a turmoil of angry choppy waves. Only expert boatmen could have kept the *prahu* afloat in that wicked sea. It was a joy to watch the skill of those boys in keeping her on an even keel by pressing their *diongs* flat on the top of the water, and from time to time taking a couple of swift concerted strokes ahead when the curl of a pursuing wave showed them that it would break over us unless they got away from it.

The wind and rain continued their wild orgy for some twenty minutes; then both let up as suddenly as they had come. In the distance I could see the squall hurrying on its passage as though eager to overtake and buffet other boats while its strength lasted.

As soon as the storm passed on, the sun came out again. Gradually the waves died down. The boys baled the water out of the *prahu* with large shells and set to work again with their paddles.

About mid-afternoon I sighted Mapia. By now the

heat had become almost unendurable; all around, on the horizon, the air seemed to be quivering. My thoughts wandered to the white man who lived on the island ahead; once again I visualized him—his squalid shack—the slatternly female who lived with him—his mongrel dog making the floor shake when it scratched at fleas. That was what I would have to rub along with for the next few weeks. Infernal nuisance! But, oh well! One could only make the best of it. I loved my free, nomadic life and would not exchange it for any other occupation on earth. I couldn't expect to find silk-cushion accommodation everywhere I went. Which reflections, while cheering me up to some extent, by no means fully dispelled my gloom concerning the uncongenial atmosphere I was about to run into.

Mapia, as we approached it, appeared to be a solid mass of vegetation. Mangroves and coconuts grew right down to the water's edge, and behind these were bigger trees—some of them gigantic—in close formation.

Soon the *prahu* was close in to shore, moving parallel with it. I was wondering how long it would be before we came upon the usual mangy settlement of native huts when a miniature bay, almost landlocked by two promontories, opened up and disclosed a view I was utterly unprepared for. I think I must have gasped. For instead of finding, as I had expected, a miserable *kampong* with a sprinkling of fishing boats lying untidily about, there was spread out before me one of the most enchanting pictures I have ever seen. Walled in at either

end by thick mangroves was a clean, crescent-shaped, sandy beach backed by an expanse of sloping lawn and well-kept gardens, in the centre of which, shaded by spreading trees, stood a long white bungalow with the roof painted a cool green. Awnings of wide orange and green stripes protected the windows and verandas. A small jetty ran out into the blue water, and a few yards therefrom lay a trim white motor launch, tied to a buoy. Every foot of the place spoke of comfort and affluence. Had the island been of any size or importance I should promptly have guessed that this was the Governor's residence.

"Good Lord!" I thought, when I had recovered from my surprise sufficiently to be able to think, "what is this? Surely the man Graavelink spoke of can't be living *there!*" Then the horrible suspicion came to me that I might have had a sun-stroke and be imagining things.

"Hey, there!" I called to the crew in general. "*Siapa punya rumah itu?* [Whose house is that?]"

Apparently they used some cannibalistic lingo of their own and did not understand Malay, for most of them ignored my question; a couple shook their heads and grinned at me through betel-nut-stained teeth. I gave up.

In a short while we were alongside the jetty, unloading my belongings, when I heard firm footsteps. Turning, I saw comings towards me a man of something above average height. He walked with a springy, athletic stride and, as he came nearer, I saw that he was lean of build and clad in a very fresh white linen suit, against which

the mahogany tan of his face and hands showed up in conspicuous contrast.

When the man reached me he said, "Good afternoon, sir. Anything I can do for you?" He spoke in that icily polite tone which Englishmen of a certain class employ when addressing someone they are not sure they want to know.

"Good afternoon," I replied. "I hope I'm not trespassing. My name's Conway. I'm a bug-hunter out here gathering up odd things for an American museum. I've come to this island to try and get hold of several specimens I'm told exist here."

"Oh!" he said. And his intonation of that "oh" clearly implied that he had suspected me of being something undesirable—now, everything would be all right.

"Aldridge is my name," he went on, extending his hand, "I'm the only white man on this bit of an island. I've got rather a decent plantation here. You must let me put you up. Jolly glad to have you. There hasn't been a civilized visitor here since some officers came ashore from a Dutch gunboat nearly two years ago."

While thanking him I noticed for the first time the extraordinarily nice expression in the man's blue eyes. His features were well defined and regular; his crisp brown hair gave off a healthy sheen. He was some half dozen years younger than myself—probably around thirty-five. A distinctly good-looking devil.

"Come along up to the house," Aldridge said, linking an arm through mine. "You must be perishing for a

drink and a tub. Leave all your things here—I'll send some coolies down for them."

Behind the leafy skyline in front of us, as we walked shorewards, the sun was sinking slowly as though reluctant to leave its sport of burning up the world. On Aldridge's lawn several sprinklers were whirring water, sending out to us the refreshing smell of earth mingled with the scents of shrubs and flowers. I drew a deep grateful breath.

"Quite the best part of the day, this," Aldridge remarked, observing my appreciation.

Chatting, we went along a curving, gravelled path up to the wide porch of the bungalow. I could see no main door—only a series of French windows—one of which Aldridge opened and we entered a large living room. Almost immediately a white-coated Malay boy appeared.

"Whisky-soda?" my host asked. "Or would you prefer something . . . ?"

"Whisky, if I may," I interrupted.

By now my eyes had adjusted themselves to the subdued light indoors and I was able to take in the details of a handsome and most livable room. It was furnished with fine Oriental pieces of the less ornate variety, several large brass urns were filled with dried aromatic leaves and spices, shirred curtains of yellow silk chintz covered the windows and, here and there, on a floor of some highly polished native wood, a few rugs were strewn. The whole thing was in excellent taste.

That room sent a number of queries jumping to my

mind as I talked with Aldridge. Did he live here alone? That was hardly likely; I seemed to detect a female touch about the place. But what female? Surely not some Japanese or Malay girl he'd picked up! Perhaps he had a perfectly nice white wife. That could be it. It was possible, though, that he might be one of those neat, fastidious bachelors. I was consumed with curiosity. Whatever it turned out to be Graavelink, in his ignorance, had woefully misled me.

Just then the boy returned with a silver tray of bottles and glasses. Aldridge mixed two drinks and handed one to me. The tinkling sound of ice against the glass made my vitals squirm with pleasure. How I needed that drink after roasting all day in the sun! And, almost finishing it at a single swig, I happened to say something complimentary about the room.

"Quite cheery, isn't it?" Aldridge answered. "We rather like it ourselves."

"We!" I thought. "So there *is* someone living with him. I've found out that much." And then, as if to put an end to my speculations, the door opened and a woman came in.

"Hullo, Sanda," said Aldridge, getting up. "Let me introduce Mr. Conway.

"How do you do?" Sanda greeted me.

Whereupon, I found myself shaking hands with a most strikingly beautiful Malay woman. She was slender, and just on the tall side for one of her race. I judged her to be a year or so this side of thirty. Her pale brown skin

had the appearance of being faintly luminous; her dark eyes, over which the long-lashed lids drooped slightly at the outer ends, were steady and thoughtful. And, too, Allah had given her a small straight nose, white even teeth, a mouth especially designed for laughter and kisses, and, most unusual for a Malay—wavy hair. But she was more than merely lovely. She had personality or whatever it is that some few individuals have and which makes them stand out so definitely from ordinary mortals.

“Mr. Conway is a scientist,” Aldridge explained. “Knows all about butterflies and beetles and things. He’s going to stay with us a while.”

“Oh, how splendid!” Sanda said, sending me a friendly smile. “We shall both love having you—and it will be so nice for Roger to have some male companionship.”

A few minutes later Sanda pressed a button and a servant brought in tea. I could scarcely look away from Sanda as she sat, talking easily, by the table. An adorable person. She wore a *baju* of fine white linen and lace. Her *sarong* was a vivid green and gold silken affair, between the end of which and the small green *spatus* on her feet a pair of slim legs were displayed that would not be given their due by any less extravagant word than ravishing. And all the time I was trying to puzzle out where this girl could have learned her English which she spoke perfectly except for a slight but rather attractive accent such as French women often have.

By and by, Aldridge took me up to my room. “Give

this button a prod if you need anything," he said. "That door leads into a shower—good cold water pumped up from a spring." Then, noticing the things lying neatly on my bed, he added, "I see the boy has put out your dinner clothes. I make a point myself of climbing into conventional kit in the evenings. Silly damned custom, but it helps to keep one from getting slack. Don't you bother, though, if you'd rather not strangle yourself with a boiled collar. And help yourself to cocktails if you get downstairs before me."

When the door closed I sank into an easy chair and looked about me. What a delightful room! It smelt refreshingly of pot-pourri. And what interesting people—particularly the woman. I had never run across anyone quite like her. A feeling almost of guilt came over me when I remembered what, on the trip across from Banda, I had imagined I was coming to. Thank heaven they didn't know anything about that. And—oh well, one of the charms of roaming about strange places of the world was the surprises one ran into every so often. I shed my sticky clothes and went to the bath.

Sanda and Aldridge were already in the living room when I went down. Sanda, in a fringed cream *sarong* and a string of small pearls looped several times around her wrist, might have been an Eastern princess. And Aldridge looked mighty well in his black trousers and white monkey jacket. After a couple of cocktails we went in to dinner at a round table on which there was glittering silver, flowers, and candles burning softly.

Throughout the meal we chatted away snugly like old friends glad to be together again. The food and the wines were excellent, and we were waited on by perfectly trained servants. Eventually Sanda rose.

"We'll have coffee in the other room," she said. "And some Napoleon brandy which Roger says is probably not Napoleon because that was all used up in Europe many years ago. Just the same, Mr. Conway, while it does not taste strong like whisky, it gives you a nicer glow afterwards and makes you feel a little like an angel and a little like a devil. One can't expect *any* brandy to do more than that, eh?"

Towards midnight, following a stroll to the end of the pier, we all went up to bed. I lay awake for a time pondering on Sanda. What was her origin? Where had she been brought up? How had she acquired that poise? And so on.

As the days went by I grew very genuinely attached to Roger Aldridge and Sanda. Between my trips into the jungle Roger showed me over his plantation—an extensive, well cared for place. His coolies were clean, well-fed and contented looking. We went shooting *babirusa* together, and fishing. On the latter excursions Sanda usually came with us. In the late afternoons we played tennis on a fine grass court shaded by the bungalow. These were the only occasions on which Sanda ever wore European costume. She looked extremely well in it—but her game was hopeless. As a rule, one set was enough for her. "That will do for today," she would say with a

good-tempered laugh, tossing her racquet onto a chair. "I'll never be able to play this game. The damn ball is always where I'm not. I'll leave you men to battle each other while I go for a swim. Come down and join me when you're ready."

Sometimes, after dinner, we went tearing out to sea in the speed boat, or paddled in a light *prahu* about the somnolent, star-reflected water of the bay and listened to the plaintive music coming from the coolie lines.

I had been two weeks in that most charming and hospitable house but still I knew almost nothing about either Sanda or Aldridge. And they intrigued me more than ever. Of one thing, though, I was certain. They were devotedly in love with each other. One could see that in a hundred ways; small attentions, glances. Somehow, it was in the atmosphere. And—a most rare thing with lovers—there existed between them an easy, happy companionship.

Aldridge and I were alone in the living room one night; Sanda was doing something in another part of the house. I happened to ask if there was any chance of his travelling by way of America next time he went home.

"I don't expect ever to go back to England again, or to any white country for that matter," he answered.

I felt that I had put an unfortunate question. I was embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said, catching my expression. "It was clumsy of me to answer you like that."

"Not at all," I assured him.

Aldridge looked embarrassed himself now. After a pause, he said, "I say, old man, having blurted out what I did, I'd rather like to tell you the whole thing. Would it bore you frightfully? You see, we've become quite good friends and I'd hate you to think me a criminal in hiding or something of that sort."

After the war (Aldridge began, returning from a side table with a long whisky and soda in each hand) I went back to Cambridge, and there (he seated himself in the easy chair opposite mine) I fell in with a set who regarded themselves as most awfully bright young people. They held that the existing ideas concerning love, honor, religion, and life in general were all stupid and antiquated. I soon became one of their leading lights. We looked upon ourselves as sort of superior Bolsheviks. We refused to pay our bills and we affected shabby clothes and atrocious manners. But women were the main plank in our campaign of revolt. We treated them abominably. To us they were cattle made for man's amusement and the propagation of the species—nothing more.

In due course the 'varsity authorities intimated to this band of superlative young asses that we would have to push off. That encouraged us. We were being noticed.

I went up to London and took furnished rooms and led a life of bumming about with a lot of odd ducks of both sexes. We gave exotic parties at which people sat about on floors littered with cigarette ash and talked literature—only Russian literature, of course. We drank

vermouth with breakfast. Free love was part of our creed. We never discussed it—that would have been too childish for us. Oh, we were the real intelligentsia!

I had no job of any sort. Work was dull and soul-destroying; I left that to the unthinking multitude. My father was making me a small allowance.

In time I accumulated a tidy collection of debts. People began suing me. My father heard about it and, after reading me a lecture to which I listened with rather amused tolerance, he paid up all I owed.

I soon got into the same fix again, and again the governor settled up for me. But when it happened a third time he declined to do anything about it unless I agreed to clear out of the country.

Well—I didn't want to upset the old boy. And what's more, I'd always had a hankering to see something of the East. So, a few days later, I hopped on a boat bound for Singapore.

It was made quite clear to me before I sailed that my allowance was to cease. I didn't care. I'd get along all right; I was one of the intelligentsia.

On reaching Singapore, however, I found myself like the proverbial fish out of water. There was no little coterie of advanced thinkers to welcome me. All the men were busy working or playing games. I was asked to a house or two for dinner but there was never any second invitation. My conversation made people sheer off.

Then, to my intense annoyance, my cash gave out and

I had to face the prospect of doing some sort of humdrum work. That was really humiliating.

I got a small job reporting, eventually. But the work bored me and I soon chucked it. Then I got a berth in a stockbroker's office. That was worse. I despised all the people I came in contact with. To me their minds were like disgustingly healthy cabbages.

After about a week I walked out on that job too, and went up to Penang. Then followed two years of kicking about all over the East. I used to work at anything I could get—but only just long enough to scrape up sufficient money to allow me to loaf for a spell. In short, I was an out-and-out waster. But I derived a sort of grim satisfaction from being a bum; I felt that I was sticking to my guns.

Finally, I wound up in Dobo, in the Aru Islands. A big Australian pearl fishing concern there gave me odd bits of work. They offered me a steady job but I didn't want that. I lived in a rickety two-room hut in the native quarter with a cheap inexperienced boy to look after me. It was a ghastly hole.

One morning, as I was wandering about for a breath of air, I ran across an excited little crowd of Malays. There was a hell of a row going on. A most repulsive looking old man was yelling at a shrivelled-up woman, and she, in turn, was shrieking and gesticulating at a young girl. To add to the din, the onlookers were voicing their various opinions, everybody talking at once.

The rumpus, I discovered, was because the screaming

hag had sold the young girl, her daughter, to the disgusting old man, and the girl refused to recognize the bargain. The man, saliva trickling from the corners of his mouth, was demanding either the girl or his money back. But the mother had already spent the money. So the man, in a frenzy of rage, was declaring he would have the woman and the girl, whom he accused of collusion to rob him, put in jail, and the woman was cursing the girl for her disobedience.

During a lull in the storm the girl said very quietly, "I was not consulted in this matter and I shall not marry that pock-marked creature who is no more than an empty snake's skin. Rather would I spend my whole life in prison. When I go to a man it will be to one of my own choosing."

At that her mother shrieked louder than ever, and the man shook his bony fists in the air and swore he'd go at once to the Controleur and start proceedings for their punishment.

"Wait a minute," I said. And I haven't the foggiest notion what prompted me to butt in—I was utterly selfish in those days and never bothered myself with other people's troubles. "How much," I asked the old man, "did you pay for this girl?"

"Twenty good *ringgits*, *tuan*," he wailed, "and me a poor man with no sons to lean on in my declining years." He wrung his hands and rolled his head from side to side.

Well—for the first time in quite a while I happened

to possess that much money and, after a moment's consideration, I paid off the ancient. He snatched the cash greedily from me, called on Allah to shower everlasting blessings on my most noble person, then he shambled off.

I was just about to push off too when the woman, hands on hips, placed herself in my way. "You must be a great and rich lord," she said, witheringly, "to part with money so readily. And it is a pretty thing you have done. After I find a suitable husband for my daughter you spoil what I have arranged. Very good. Then you will take her for yourself. She is an ungrateful, disobedient creature, and she may not return to my roof. It will be one less mouth for me to feed. In future, tuan," she concluded, with a sweetly poisonous smile, "Sanda will be your charge. You have bought and paid for her. Peace be with you." She salaamed and left, cackling as she went away along the dusty street.

That was a distinct jolt, Conway. I didn't want a darned girl on my hands, but I'd got her in wrong all round and it was up to me to do something about it. I was in the middle of a bit of thinking when Sanda came over to me.

"Tuan," she said, "I want to thank you for being very kind to me. And, please, you must take no notice of what my mother said; you are in no way responsible for me. Perhaps, though, you will let me work in your house until I have earned twenty ringgits there—then, I will go away."

I saw that the girl would probably either have to sleep

in the open and soon become riddled with fever or be driven into a brothel if I didn't take her in, so I agreed to what she suggested.

When I got home for tiffin about two hours later I found Sanda had already sent my lazy boy packing and installed herself there. The place was cleaner and neater than I had ever seen it before, and I was promptly served with a great deal better meal than I'd been having.

Sanda turned out to be a gem of a servant—quiet, intelligent, thorough. She was never idle. Between doing her other work she made new window curtains and floor mats and so forth. The only fault I had to find with her was that she was always wanting money to buy things for the house, and while this rather annoyed me, I somehow got the feeling that I'd be ashamed if I ever ran out of funds and couldn't give her what she asked for. So instead of loafing most of the time I took to doing more and more work for the pearling company.

Gradually, I found myself looking forward to getting home in the evenings. And then, one night while Sanda and I were having dinner, it came over me like an avalanche that I was in love with her.

That was the big turning point in my life. Sanda and I became like two absurd young lovers in an old-fashioned novel—ours wasn't just the usual affair between a white man and a colored girl. I wanted to do things for her and make her happy. And just how perfectly wonderful she was towards me I haven't a good enough command of words to describe.

In a little while I developed a tremendous ambition to "make good" as you call it in America; I wanted to amount to something in Sanda's eyes.

My chance came when a half-caste manager of one of Said Abdul Buraala's plantations was bunged into jail for selling copra and stuff to a trader and filching the money. I went to the old Said and asked him for the job. He seemed a bit dubious at first; of course, he knew I'd been pretty much of a waster round about Dobo. But when I told him I'd work for a nominal salary provided he'd stand me a fairish percentage of the profits his attitude changed.

"You may try it on those terms if you wish, my friend," he said. "It cannot be much out of my pocket even if you do no better than the managers before you. That place has never yielded enough profit to pay for the pleasures of a eunuch."

Well—I took it on, nevertheless. Sanda and I came over here together. And what a foul dump it was when we first struck it! The so-called manager's house was falling to pieces, the whole plantation was a wilderness of weeds and neglect, and the few coolies here were half-starved and covered with skin disease. It was awful.

However, we set to work. Sanda soon made the house quite livable, but it took me over a year of slogging fourteen hours a day to get the plantation in decent shape. By that time we were making a little money.

Then, I hired a couple of luggers from Buraala and started pearl fishing off this island. That was a lucky

move. I made a tidy bit of cash out of that venture. The shell was thick about here in those days, but it's almost completely cleaned up now.

All this time I'd been falling more and more deeply in love with Sanda. You know, Conway, once in a while it seems to please the Creator to turn out a prize human being. And Sanda is just that. You've seen for yourself how lovely she is to look at. But in addition to that she's got a grand disposition, she's generous, affectionate, loyal, brainy, amusing. Yet there's nothing humble about her—she's chock-full of pride and character. But I mustn't inflict too much of this on you.

During our third year here the Said paid us a visit. After inspecting the place thoroughly he congratulated me on what I'd made of it and asked if I'd like to buy it outright. He'd be glad to get rid of a business so far away from his headquarters, he said. Well—since he made the price quite reasonable and the plantation was now showing a very nice profit, I jumped at the chance. Of course I was tremendously bucked to become the owner of the property, but what pleased me more was to listen to Sanda conversing with the Said in the English she had learned from me.

A few months later I ran into an amazingly good streak of finding pearls. Hidden away at the bottom of a drawer in my bedroom there were two pill boxes full of gems beside a larger box containing baroque and small stones. They were worth nearly enough to pay off the

balance of what I owed Buraala on the plantation. I am afraid some of the boys who helped me to open the shell must have talked, which led to something that makes my bones turn to water every time I think of it.

Sanda had gone up to bed ahead of me one night. I was downstairs working out the details of some new planting when I heard my name shouted, followed by a string of piercing screams and the patter of bare feet on the floor above. Grabbing a lamp, I raced upstairs in a wild panic and found Sanda lying on the bed, gasping. The mosquito curtains round it were torn to ribbons. Then, to my horror, I saw that Sanda's *baju* was cut and blood-stained in several places. And there were gashes on her hands and arms.

She could tell me nothing at first. Almost crazy with fear for her I ran for sticking plaster and bandages and began tying up her wounds. Some of them were long, but thank God, they didn't go very deep.

When she was able to talk Sanda told me a light movement in the room had wakened her and, half opening one eye, she was about to say "Hullo Roger" or something when she saw standing by the bed a tall, naked Chinaman, heavily oiled and grasping a murderous knife. They smother themselves all over with grease, you know, when they go out on robbing expeditions. You can't possibly hold the beggars even if you get your hands on them.

Sanda had the presence of mind to close her eye again

and pretend to be sleeping soundly. She knew someone was after my pearls, and she knew too that that villainous Chinaman would plunge his knife into her if she stirred. And there the poor child lay, feeling the gleaming eyes of that swine boring into her, and listening to a second person stealthily opening boxes and things. She was quite aware that no harm would come to her so long as she didn't move or make any attempt to raise an alarm. She decided to remain as still as a corpse. But that wasn't so easy; she had to fight with all her will-power to prevent giving herself away by beginning to tremble with the fright she naturally felt. In a few moments she was faced with another trouble; she'd become so wrought up that she thought she was going to be physically sick.

Sanda stayed perfectly still until she heard a drawer of the chest where the pearls were kept being pulled out. That set her mind leaping in another direction. She told herself that she couldn't lie there and allow me to be robbed without putting up some sort of fight. And then she did something that stamps her, by George, as one of the world's pluckiest. Gathering all her nerve together she yelled for me; in the same instant she snatched up the pillow and covered her face and as much of her body as she could with it.

At her outcry there was an angry snarl, like that of a savage beast deprived of its prey, from the watching Chinaman. He drove his knife at her through the mosquito netting again and again. Sanda emitted scream

after terrified scream and struck out blindly with one arm in the hope of deflecting the knife.

Suddenly the attack on her ceased; Sanda heard the men speak to each other in urgent whispers, hurrying bare feet slithered across the wooden floor; and Sanda began to realize that her cuts were hurting most frightfully.

After making Sanda as comfortable as I could I got a revolver and went out, slaughter-minded, to look for those cursed Chinks. But they had vanished completely. There had been a Chinese trading *prahu* kicking about here for some time. We never saw it again.

Sanda's wounds kept her in bed several weeks. It made me shudder every time I thought of the awful chance she had taken that night. I would rather have had the whole world stolen from me than any harm should come to her. What if she had been killed? I couldn't bear to think about that. And then, one day, it struck me with a sickening shock that I might lose her in some other way. She might grow tired of being with me. By some chance a man might come into her life whom she'd want to marry. I decided then and there to make my position more secure.

Within a matter of seconds I was asking Sanda to be my wife. At first she seemed a little troubled. "Do you think it is wise to change anything?" she asked. "After all, we are so very happy as we are. And if you ever fell in love with a white woman you would be able to go

to her, but if we marry you will no longer have that feeling of freedom. It might irk you in time." But when I insisted and told her why I wanted her to marry me I could see that she was pretty much pleased.

A few weeks later I had to go down to Australia on business. Sanda and I were married at Port Moresby prior to taking the steamer from there. We had a great time on that trip, and I felt much safer now that we were legally tied up.

We were staying at one of the big hotels in Sydney when, just as we went into our room one night, Sanda put her arm across her eyes and began to weep most pitifully. I'd never seen her do such a thing before; she isn't the tearful kind. Rather bewildered and alarmed, I asked what was wrong.

"Oh, Roger," she said, "I wish we had not come here. I am so miserable. Wherever we go people nudge each other and stare at us as though we were strange animals in the zoo. They have no manners. And I know what they are thinking. They think you are a foolish man who has thrown himself away on a heathen Malay girl. They do not understand our love. They do not understand that it was written thus before we were born. Promise you will never take me to a white country again."

I promised—quite willingly. We came back here in due course. After a while I realized I would never go away without Sanda; I couldn't get along for a day with-

out her. And why should I want to leave this place anyway? I have Sanda, my work, my play—I couldn't be better off or more contented if I were a king.

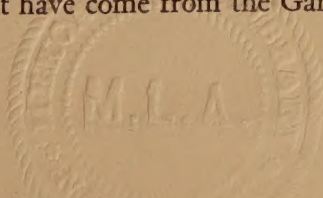
The following year Sanda persuaded me to build this bungalow and have these grounds laid out. It's all her idea—furnishing, decorating, garden, everything. When the whole thing was finished and we were installed in it she said to me one night, "How do you like your English home, old boy? I tried to make it as near as possible to what you were accustomed to in your own country; then, I thought, perhaps you would never want to leave it—or me."

I was deeply moved at that, Conway. And, by Jove, despite the Eastern furniture, there is a distinct English atmosphere about the place, isn't there? Sanda got it all out of poring night after night over books and magazines. She's a marvellous person."

"And now that I've finished explaining myself, as it were," Aldridge concluded, "I think I'll dig up Sanda and go out for a spot of air. Will you come along?"

"No thanks," I said. "I'll tumble into bed if you don't mind. I'm dog tired."

I went upstairs and sat looking out at an open window of my bedroom to finish the last of a pipe that was drawing sweetly. A soft breeze from the water stirred the leaves of the trees and brought with it the perfume of flowers that might have come from the Garden of Eden.



I was thinking of Sanda and Roger Aldridge when they suddenly emerged from the shadow of the house into the moonlight, walking slowly, arms thrown lightly about each other's waists.

I watched them as they went towards the beach. And then I began to think of my bachelor life. Yes, it had certain advantages, but. . . . And I would be forty on my next birthday.

I undressed thoughtfully and turned into bed.





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